# Writers in Progress
# 2006 - 2007

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We congratulate James Barrile of Haverhill, a student in Tom Priest's spring 2007 Illustration class, who won the *Writers in Progress* cover design contest. His striking illustration was selected as the best choice for our cover because it graphically represents the progress Basic Writing students accomplish over the course of the semester. We are grateful for all of the talented designs submitted by the Illustration class.

**Special thanks to:**
Basic Writing student contributors; Basic Writing faculty; Diane Gori, Writing Center Coordinator; Joanna Fortna, Basic Writing Curriculum Coordinator; David B. Kelley, Ed. D., Dean, Instructional and Student Support; Patricia McDermott, Assistant Dean, Developmental Education; the PACE and Voc-Ed programs.

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## Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to you.

We honor submissions from:

Ana A. Aguilar
Lenin Alberto
Angela Amenta
José Arache
Yudeisy Arias
Sonya Babineau
Dariane Cardoso
Rebecca Claus
Cathy Colon
Andre Coriolan
Annia de la Rosa
Laticha Davis
Franklin Diaz
Mike Eddy
Samantha Greenwood
Stephanie Guzman
Kendrah Hannagan
Caitlin Hutchins
BettyAnn Joseph
Alicia Keebaugh
Diana Keough
Sang Kim
DinaMarie LaMarche
Gláucia B.R. Leal
Junior Leal
Stefanie Lennox
Nicholas Lonardo
Ashley Mancusi
Ashley Mason
Jenna Masucci
Meaghan McCabe
Yiralda C. Montero
Giovanny Mora
Deanna Morris
Justin Nardone
Isley Naveo
Mai Nham
Chris Park
Jonathan Pena
Tanya Piercy
Brianna Roy
Maggie Ruiz
Teri Samot
Nilmarie Sanchez
Laura Santana
Leslie Rhodes Scully
Megan Silvers
Jessica Suarez
Fengxue Wang

Introduction
by Lynne Nadeau

This year, I was all ready to write my usual introduction to this new version of Writers in Progress when I learned that a group of students had written it for me. For a special project, Clare Thompson-Ostrander's class wrote letters of advice for all of you, the new Basic Writing students in 2007-2008. (You'll find these letters at the beginning of the sections in Writers in Progress.) In the letter below, Alen, Patricia, and Angela have thought about their own concerns as they began their writing class. In a few focused paragraphs, they've summarized what worked for them and what can work for you, too.

Here, in the words of our students from the spring of 2007, is your guide to what it takes to succeed in Basic Writing.

## Dear Basic Writer:

Soon you will find yourself in the same position that we were in a few months ago. Please let us take some time to give you advice on how to succeed in Basic Writing. We know that you might be concerned about long essays, how to format a paragraph or essays, or about grammar. We come with this letter to encourage you and give you some suggestions to improve your skills.

Be proud of yourself for taking the first step in the right direction. When we started taking this class we were a little afraid. We didn't believe that we could write, but after the first couple of weeks you will learn how much potential you have, just like we did. We know how difficult it was for you to decide to go back to school. We were in the same position. We are working full-time, taking care of our families and the running to school. It sounds too difficult, but if you believe in yourself you will be able to do it. By taking this first step you are halfway there because it takes courage and strength to admit that you need to learn more.

Another way to succeed in this class is by taking the class assignments seriously. You can do this by being present to all the classes. Prepare the assignments and turn them in on time. Visiting the Writing Center will be of great help to you, as it has been for us. We, too, were concerned about the outcome of this class, and the quality of work requested of us. We overcame this problem by paying attention in class while the lessons were presented.

We wish you good luck on your journey as a writer. Do not panic. Have confidence in yourself and take the class seriously. By taking the class seriously we were able to keep up with the assignments; we also became better writers and we were able to apply what we learned in the class. By following our advice, we can assure you that you'll be as successful as we were in Basic Writing. Enjoy your Basic Writing class and have fun. Who knows? You may be the next Ernest Hemingway.

Sincerely,
Alen, Patricia, and Angela

To You, It's Just a Pillow
by Juliana Gonzalez

When you first walk into my small room and look down onto my twin-sized bed, you will notice a single square pillow being displayed. To you this may be some ordinary toss pillow that is just used for decoration, but to me this pillow embraces a lot of meaning and retains many great memories within it. It is one of the first things that I got to make my senior year at Whittier Vo-Tech, and it is one of the things that I am most proud of.

The first day of shop we were told we could make anything we desired, as long as it did not require more than two days to complete. A light bulb quickly went off in my head and I thought of pillows. I love and enjoy making pillows. They are fun, quick, and easy to make. I even had a yard of fabric already in mind that was shoved in my closet somewhere underneath all of my shoes and clothes.

The fabric I used to make this significant pillow, which now lies on my bed, is called twill fabric. You can see tiny threads that were woven horizontally and vertically together to form the fabric. Each thread has a different color than the one next to it. Every individual thread is colored either hot pink, light pink, white, or purple. However, the light pink color stands out the most because there are more of those colored threads. When I run my hand across the fabric, I can feel soft tiny bumps; each new bump is a different thread of color. On the front of my 15-by-15 pillow are five red and pale pink hearts that are patched on. The red solid cotton fabric, which makes up some of the hearts, brings out the hot pink threads that are woven into the pillow's material. Each heart is frayed around the edges. When I run my hands around the soft, fuzzy, frayed edges, it reminds me of my cat Tiger's tail. The red zipper, located at the bottom of the pillow, helps tie in the red hearts and makes the pillow look complete and as if everything belongs. If you look closely enough at the zipper area, you will see imperfection spots where the fabric did not catch the zipper's seam allowance when it was being sewn on.

My pillow smells like absolutely nothing. When I shove my face into it and take a deep breath through my nose, I smell just air. This is very surprising to me that it smells this way considering the fact that I have never washed it since the day I completed making it about a year ago. Also it is always being used in some kind of way. I take my pillow on various trips with me, such as camping trips, ski trips. Sometimes I take it with me if I'm sleeping over a friend's house. I am also sleeping with it every night. Even when I am not around, my pillow is still being used by my cat Tiger. She is always curled up next to it taking one of her cat naps or just lounging around purring away.

On the upper right-hand corner of my pillow, there is a faint stain where I had spilt some hot cocoa that I was drinking while I was on a school ski trip. The ski trip was when I first learned how to snowboard. Also, it was the first time I had gone away without my parents or sister accompanying me. Instead my pillow was accompanying me and comforting me in a way on the trip. After a long hard day of falling down so much, it was nice to go back to the hotel room and see my pillow waiting there for me to rest upon it.

In the morning, when I usually wake up late and I am rushing around to get ready for the day, I always make sure to quickly make my bed and display my pillow. I do this so when I come home from a long day of school and work, my bed always looks warm, comfy, and inviting to me. My pillow is the most comfortable thing to fall asleep on at night after a busy day. I usually fall asleep upon it when I am watching a TV show or movie that does not catch my interest, but when I am watching something that is scary you can always find it being squished between my arms and me, acting as a security blanket. After sleeping with it all night and I wake up in the morning, I feel as if I had gotten a much more rejuvenating sleep than I would have gotten without it.

I remember one day when I came home from a long hot day of school and soccer practice, my mom was in the kitchen setting the table for dinner. This is when she had asked me, "Where did you buy that cute pillow that is on your bed?"

I replied with a big smile on my face, "I didn't buy it. I made it in shop."

She looked shocked and said, "Get out of town! You know, Julie, you should open up a pillow shop and call it Julie's Custom Made Pillows."

I just chuckled and started to walk away. My mom is always saying that I should open up a bead shop, or a clothes store, or a little boutique, or something. She does this because she knows I am a crafty person and I love to make and design things, and I am really good at it, too. When she had thought that I had bought my pillow at a store, it made me so happy and proud of what I have created, and I think it was such a great compliment to get.

Every time I look at my pillow I think of the four years that I spent in the fashion and interior design program at Whittier and all the skills and ideas I have acquired from the experience there. These skills and what I have learned from there will stay with me forever. I sometimes find myself in a daydream after looking at it and going back to the time I spent in shop when all of us "fashion chicks" would slowly one by one stray from our work and gather around one of the big rectangular tables. We would start gossiping about what was going on in school or what had happened over the weekend. We would talk about guys, what was going on in our lives, clothes, things that had happened in the news, or sports, basically anything and everything. You name it; we have talked about it more than once. Then Mrs. Mills would walk by and notice we were not doing our work as usual and she would say, "Okay girls! Break up the sewing circle and get some work done or I'll give you some alterations to do." Alteration orders were not fun to do at all. This had all probably happened every day in shop.

This pillow that lies on my bed is more than just an ordinary pillow. It is a symbol of who I am, where I have been, what I love to do, and what I have done and accomplished in life. My pillow will always be with me, wherever I go, whenever I wake up, and whenever I come home. I have had some of my best times of my life with this pillow. Just being able to look at it and get all of these memories back from looking at it is what makes this pillow extraordinary to me, and I know that my pillow will acquire a lot of other memories.

*Juliana Gonzalez, 18, lives in Methuen and is working towards an accounting degree at NECC. She took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course and now feels that writing "is not that bad." She even enjoys writing now. In addition to making beautiful pillows, Juliana enjoys making clothes and running.*

# A Very Young Author
by John Greene

I have a niece. Her name is Kendra. She and I are very close and we spend a lot of time together. When she was young, I babysat for her quite often and she was a very cranky baby. Her parents were always saying that the only time she wasn't crying was when she was sleeping or in her Uncle Johnny's arms. When she was in the first grade, her very first homework assignment was to write a book about a family member. Although she had a lot of family members, I was proud that she chose me to write about. I will never forget the day she called to tell me that I am the one that she chose. I asked my niece to read me the book over the phone. Her reply was, "Uncle, you are invited to my first-grade class to listen to me read the book out loud to you." She also told me that her teacher read the book and said, "Your uncle is going to cry when you read the book to him."

I will always remember walking into her first-grade classroom and seeing the book for the first time. The name of the book is MY UNCLE JOHNNY. The color of the book is red and has a hand-drawn picture, colored in crayon, of me standing in front of a large tree with a big smile on my face. The size of the book is 9 inches by 12 inches. The cover of the book is protected by clear plastic, and there is rough-sewn stitching holding the book together. There are seven yellow colored pages made out of construction paper, and each page contains anywhere from one to three very short meaningful sentences that are typed, cut out, and glued to each page. As you turn the pages in the book, you can clearly hear the crackling of the old, stiff construction paper. The book, because of its age, has a very distinctive smell somewhat like an old tent. There are also hand-drawn pictures colored in with crayons on each page. Although the pictures on the page look like they were drawn by a six-year-old, one can actually visualize the meaning of each sentence. The picture on each page shows me with short spiked hair wearing a brown shirt and blue pants. The other person in the picture is my niece. She has long hair and is dressed in a reddish-pink shirt and purple pants. Most of the pictures of her and I show a big happy smile on our faces.

While I was reading the book to myself in her classroom, my niece gently removed the book from my hands and proceeded to the front of the class to read the book to me. It was a very emotional experience. My eyes watered more with each page that she read to me. With each tear that I shed, the bigger her smile grew. The little things that I had done with her that she wrote about in her book, such as going out for lunch together, taking her with me every Saturday in my oil truck, or just giving her a big hug and saying "I love you," never meant much to me. I never gave it any thought of what those little things meant to her. After she read the book, I realized those little things meant a lot to the both of us.

I keep the book in the top right-hand drawer of my dresser. Keeping it there enables me to glance at it every morning. My niece, Kendra, is now 17 years old. She comes over our house every Sunday afternoon to have lunch with my wife and I. Occasionally I take the book out of my dresser for her to read to me. As my niece gently removes the book from my hands, my mind wanders back to her first-grade class. Although many years have passed, that little book still makes me cry.

The book is now 11 years old, and it is my most prized possession. I feel very fortunate that my sweet, little, six-year-old niece was able to put her feelings towards me on paper for me to enjoy for the rest of my life. We have moved three times since it's been written. As the moving truck is driving down the street, my wife will always ask me if I'll miss the house. My reply to her is always, "Did you remember to bring the book?"

*John Greene, 51, lives in Saugus, MA, and works as a licensed electrician. He is pursuing a degree in electronic technology at NECC. Before taking Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course, John felt that writing was "an unwelcome chore for me." Now he says, "Writing instills me with pleasure and I welcome the challenge." When he is not writing, John also enjoys saltwater fishing and riding his ATV in the Maine woods.*

# Sex Wax
by Eric Vose

Sex Wax is usually used by surfers to keep them on the board, but I have it for a completely different reason. I like the way it smells. I know that may sound weird, but there is a good reason for it. Sex Wax smells like the best times of my life. As the smell of a home-cooked meal might bring you back to your childhood, Sex Wax brings me back to mine.

Mr. Zogs Original Sex Wax is a staple for any surfer or skim boarder. It's flat on the top and bottom, so you can rub it evenly on your board to keep you from sliding off. This bar-soap-sized, sticky, waxy circle comes with a bright orange-colored label on it, and even though it's wrapped in plastic, its scent still comes through. They are a dime a dozen, but mine is unique because I've had it for four years. Some might say that's stupid, and I can't say that they're wrong. It only costs a dollar and it's made to be used, but I just can't bring myself to use it.

I got my Sex Wax in a little surf/skate/snowboard shop in Freeport, Maine, of all places, about as far away from any decent surf as you can get. I was camping at the time and planning to go to the beach for some skim boarding. I bought a few of them and put them in my camper's refrigerator to keep them from melting in the heat. I only used one when I went to the beach, and the day after that I came back to Massachusetts. Little did I know that weekend would be my last weekend up there for the year, and the camper would be closed up and my Sex Wax forgotten.

It was a long snowy winter, and I was really missing the ocean by the spring. In May when we went up to open up the camper, I opened the fridge and there was my long forgotten wax. I grabbed it, and I'm not sure why, but the first thing I did was smell it. As soon as I did, it took me back to all the fun of my skim boarding the summer before, standing on the sand watching the waves, waiting for the perfect one. It even made me feel hungry because I always was after a session at the beach. It also reminded me of my rides home from the beach, discussing all of the fun my stepbrother and I had, and the tricks and bails we did.

I remember one time we went to a new beach that was a little steeper than we were used to. We were standing there watching the waves, trying to figure out the timing. That's when I saw it, two waves stacked on top of each other making a giant double up.

"Mine!" I screamed, as I started sprinting.

I went flying down the sand to the biggest wave of my life. As soon as I hit it, I felt the board shoot out from under me, and I was airborne. The next thing I felt was the shot of adrenaline when my body realized that it was completely upside down. That's when my world froze. I don't think I will ever forget what I saw in those moments of suspended reality, my brother standing on the sandy sky with his mouth gaping and eyes popping out. I forced the rest of the rotation and hit the water. Then everything sped back up. When I resurfaced, I turned to look at my brother.

"You must've been five feet above the water!" he shrieked.

"I know," I said shakily. "I can't believe I'm still alive."

"I don't think any amount of wax would've helped you on that one," he chuckled as we walked to a new spot on the beach.

After I revisited all those memories is when I decided I would never use it. I always keep it in my room on my shelf right in plain sight, so I always know where it is and don't have to go looking for it whenever I need a little pickup.

My Sex Wax is my security blanket. It keeps me centered by reminding me of a carefree time when I had nothing on my mind but pure happiness, back to a time when my only responsibility was getting home for supper. My Sex Wax makes me hope that after this hectic time I will be able to relax and have peace in my life by reminding me of a perfect place in my past.

*A business major at NECC, Eric Vose, 17, took the Basic Writing course with Craig Stevens in the fall of 2006. Before taking the course, Eric says, "I wasn't a big fan of writing." Now that he's completed the course, he feels, "It's a bit easier." When he is not out surfing, Eric enjoys skateboarding and listening to music.*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We are former Basic Writing students. We have all enjoyed this semester in Basic Writing, improving our writing skills and making us all better editors and writers. We have learned our strengths and weaknesses in writing. The exercises we did helped us all with our editing skills, and the writing samples that we have practiced have helped us also. The advice we give you will help you succeed in Basic Writing and become better writers. We advise you to attend every class, access the Writing Center weekly, and don't procrastinate.

Attending class is something you must do. If you don't go to class, then you could be dropped from the class. I know from experience that if you don't go to class, then you don't know what is going on in class and you can't participate. Last semester I was enrolled in this class but I kept avoiding going to class. My work was always late and I never had any clue as to what was going on in the classroom. I ended up failing for the semester all because I didn't want to go to class, and when I did go to class I could not participate.

To help you with your writing and editing skills, there is the Writing Center. There is a Writing Center in Lawrence, as well as in Haverhill. At the Writing Center, the tutors give you feedback on your essays. The feedback they give you is not criticism; it is to help you improve your essays. They tell you what to include and what is not necessary. We have all visited the Writing Center weekly and all left with positive advice for our essays. The Writing Center has helped all of us to succeed in Basic Writing and has helped make us all better writers.

One last piece of advice to you is not to procrastinate. Don't put off doing your homework or writing a journal or an essay. Last semester, two of us took this course and neither one of us passed. Neither one of us did our work nor did we go to class. We put off doing any work passed in until the last minute. As a result of that, we both failed the class and had to repeat it the following semester. It's a lot easier to take a course one semester and do your work, rather than take the same exact class the following semester because you didn't feel like doing your work or going to class.

This is our advice to you from our first-hand experience. We have all improved our skills throughout this semester and look forward to writing in the future. Good luck to you, incoming Basic Writing students.

Sincerely,
Stephanie, Alycia, and Nicole

Kind of a Mother
by Nsmire Ntamuhanga

Not many years ago, I thought that only your real mother could love you, support you, and have patience with you. However, in 2005, I discovered that I was mistaken. What nice person have I met in these past two years? I met Sandra in May of 2005. Sandra means "helper of mankind," and her last name is Scarpegnato. This name is Italian and I don't know the meaning. Sandra influences me due to her hardworking, funny, and adventurous personality. She is compassionate, helpful, and an advisor.

Sandra is a 59-year-old woman who used to have long blonde hair but she lost all her hair due to chemotherapy treatment. Now that her hair has started growing back, she has short gray hair. Her face is round with a fair complexion. She has laugh lines that encircle her kind blue eyes, light blonde eyelashes, and tiny eyebrows. She has a straight medium nose and thin pink lips. She has small white teeth and a beautiful smile. When she smiles, she reminds me of my real mother which makes me stare at her.

I do love her style, which varies from day to day, very much. She always wears long straight skirts with shirts that match. She has special kinds of shoes that she wears because she has trouble with her feet. Her shoes have to be wide and open in the back, and they have to be leather. Since she was diagnosed with cancer and lost her hair, she wears hats and leaves a little of her cute gray hair hanging out. She doesn't wear makeup or jewelry. Since she can't have blood pressure tests or needles in her left arm because she had lymph nodes removed, she wears an emergency bracelet in case of an incident.

Sandra is a hard worker. Her hands are a challenge for a lot of people due to how she works. She works as a teacher and she is a great cook. She works very quickly, which makes me nervous every time I am doing things with her. When she starts cooking, I realize that we are going to eat a nice and delicious meal. Because of her creativity, it is hard to tell what she will present on the table until she is done with her dish. She can't sit down for an hour without doing something. Sometimes when she is sick, people get mad at her because she pushes herself to work even though she is not feeling well. She always says, "You can't appreciate your health until you feel bad."

Sandra is the funniest person I have ever met in my life. When I am with her, it is hard for me to be sad because she cracks jokes to make me laugh. I remember one day we were going to Maine and because I was very quiet she said to me, "You are giving me a headache." I didn't know what she meant.

I said, "What?"

She repeated, "You are giving me a headache."

I said, "I don't understand what you mean by saying that."

She answered me, "You are very quiet."

Another day we were going to Building #19, and we passed by a cemetery. "How many people are in there?" she asked me.

"I don't know," I said.

She said, "All of them." Even when I call her, she makes jokes first when she answers the phone to make me laugh.

She is an adventurous person who loves to go out whenever she has the opportunity. She always wants to go to the mountains to have fun. I remember last year in the summer, we went to different mountains. She took me to the White Mountains where

we watched a lot of shows. We watched the bear show, and this was my first time seeing bears playing basketball, riding bicycles, and checking mail. I was amazed watching those bears.

"You haven't seen anything yet," Sandra said to me.

I looked at her. "Wait until you see what people can do with their bodies," she said again. We waited, and when I saw the other show I was very shocked to see people fit into a two-by-two-foot box. Sandra asked me, "Do you believe me?"

I said, "Yes."

I never know with Sandra where she will take me. One day she told me, "Let's go."

I asked her, "Where are we going?"

Because she doesn't always know where she will end up going, she just said, "You will see." We went into Boston to Haymarket and visited other places in downtown Boston. Sometimes we will go shopping in different places: Maine, New Hampshire, or here in Massachusetts.

Sandra has a lot of compassion for people, and she does everything she can to help people. I remember when I was ready to have my daughter, Sandra was going through chemotherapy and she still went with me to the hospital. She was there for more than 24 hours comforting me. When I moved from Boston, where I was living when I came to this country, to Haverhill, Sandra helped me pack all my stuff and at that time she had trouble with her back. What a sacrifice she made for me!

She is a helper and an advisor. She helps me a lot in many ways. I remember when I first came to the United States, I didn't speak any English and she was there to correct me when I said something that wasn't correct. She had me read books, which helped me a lot. When I had my daughter, she taught me how to take care of her. I am in school today because of her advice. I remember the day that Sandra told me that I should go to school because having a career is very important, and it is the key to success in life. In August of last year, she brought me here to NECC to register. I was very nervous, but she kept telling me, "You can do it."

Sandra's funny and adventurous personality, her compassion for people, and the way she helps people influence me a lot. She is more than a mother to me due to the advice she gives me and I love her a lot. I am really thankful to have her in my life. She is a good example to me, and since I have met her I have changed a lot. I am happier than I have ever been in my life. I want to be like her. I want to have more compassion for people and help people like she does. I thank God for giving me such a good friend. I am what you see today because of her, and without her I don't know where I would be.

*Eighteen months ago, Nsmire Ntamuhanga, 23, moved from her native country, Africa, to live in the United States. She now lives in Haverhill, MA, and is pursuing a nursing degree at NECC. She was scared of writing until she took Basic Writing with Joanna Fortna. Now, she is a very confident writer.*

My Other Half
by Alicia L. Pouliot

Two years ago I met a man who has inspired me to be a better person in all aspects of my life. Jason and I have been a couple for one and a half years. I look at him and see the person that I want to be one day. Jason has been a huge part of my support system, helping me in any way that he can and listening when I just need someone to talk to. He has pushed me to work harder in everything that I do. The three qualities that stand out most are his strength, thoughtfulness, and his determination.

In most aspects Jason's appearance is very average. He stands just five foot eight. He is considered short compared to most men. He is well built at 180 pounds. His hair is light brown and kept short, the same as it was in his days as a Marine. He has the most amazing blue eyes; they are clear like the ocean water surrounding a tropical island. He is 29 years old, but he still has a baby face. When we first met, I thought he was 23, and he was flattered by that. Jason wears thin black-framed glasses for reading and driving, and they give him a look of sophistication. Jason has a clean-cut appearance: professional and stylish. He is always clean shaven. Sometimes he will shave twice in the same day. His friends tease him for liking some very female-oriented things; he enjoys manicures and pedicures, facials, and even getting his eyebrows waxed. The only piece of jewelry that Jason owns is a silver bracelet his father gave him for Christmas from the island of Saint Croix. He has a total of six tattoos. He has a Chinese symbol on each of his forearms; one stands for courage and the other for strength. There is a tribal band tattoo that goes three-quarters of the way around his right bicep, a large black dragon on his left bicep, and a three-leaf clover on his left pectoral muscle; it is green with hints of yellow. He also has a tribal eye on his right shoulder blade. These tattoos enhance Jason's natural good looks.

Jason has been faced with several tragedies in his life, but he always faces them with the same remarkable strength. A little over a year ago, Jason's youngest sister Katie was diagnosed with clinical depression after she tried to take her own life. Jason tried to help by talking to her and being there when she needed him. For a long time it seemed that she was doing better, but in October of last year, Katie attempted suicide again. For hours Jason sat silently in the hospital waiting room while the doctors tried to save her life. When the doctor came out, he told Jason and his family that Katie was gone. He didn't say anything for a long time, but when we got home that night, he said something that took me by surprise. He said, "She was clearly unhappy with life, and I hope that death will bring her peace." I was so amazed that he was able to find the silver lining in such a devastating event.

When Jason and I first started dating, he was very thoughtful. He would go out of his way to impress me with romantic gestures, and he still does. One occasion stands out above the rest. We had gone out to a local bar for some drinks with Jason's best friend Adam and his girlfriend Rita. We were joking around about how funny it would be if Jason sang Karaoke.

"I don't care how much he likes you, Alicia. He won't do it," said Adam.

"I know him well enough to know that isn't going to happen," Rita said.

"I know he isn't going to do it, but a girl can dream," I said.

The next thing we knew, the DJ was calling Jason to the stage and announcing that he would be singing one of my favorite songs, "Just to See You Smile" by Tim

McGraw. Jason was so nervous that he was trembling and his voice sounded scratchy. I was speechless and I was in shock. When he was finished, he came back to the table and gave me a kiss. He sounded awful, but I didn't mind. Jason didn't do it because he thought he would be good at it, but because he knew it would make me happy.

Jason's determination is one of his best qualities. It has gotten him to where he is professionally and personally. He has been working in the moving industry for several years and has climbed the corporate ladder at a quick pace. Bob was a good friend and had been Jason's boss for more than five years. For over a year, Bob stepped back from running the company to handle things in his personal life, leaving Jason to run the business and still perform the duties that his own job entailed. Jason didn't mind though; he loved the challenge. He knew that it would prepare him for a more challenging position in the future, and it did. About six months ago, a company that he contracted for offered him a job as the facilities' manager, and it came with a long list of benefits. All of Jason's hard work and determination had finally paid off.

Having Jason in my life has made me want to work hard to succeed in my life. For years I had put off going to college until Jason gave me a swift kick. I had always said I would go when the kids were older and I had more time. Then Jason put things into perspective for me. He said, "There will never be an ideal time. Life will always be too busy." I realized that he was right: There is no time like the present.

Jason has been a very influential person in my life. He has always pushed me to work hard and try new things. In the past two years I have learned many things from Jason, but the most important has been to believe in myself, the way that he always has. I feel incredibly blessed to have such an amazing person in my life.

*Alicia L. Pouliot, 23, is a mother of two, Lydia, age 8, and Nathan, age 4 ½ . She is a business management major at NECC. Before taking the Basic Writing course with Pat Scannell, she thought she wasn't very good at writing. Now that she's completed the course, she says, "In taking Basic Writing I have found that I am not a horrible writer and I actually enjoyed the class."*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We are Jessica and Wassana, and we are former Basic Writing students. We would like to give you some advice on succeeding in Basic Writing. For the most part, all new students who are entering Basic Writing should not be afraid. Tell yourself that you have one goal in common, which is to become better writers.

One thing that really helped us in the Basic Writing class was organizing our ideas on paper first. We always do a first draft. This allows us to stay focused on our topics and make changes when necessary. The teacher's comments and peer reviews helped us strengthen our essays, too. We learned by those comments what our readers thought about our papers and what they felt our papers lacked. We used their comments to answer questions that might benefit our papers. Have confidence in yourself and in your writing. Use the comments from your teacher and peers as a shoulder to lean on, or as a crutch to carry you until you can stand alone.

In addition, do not be afraid if someone can write better than you and do not worry if your English is not good enough. We are not American from birth. English is our second language. We were nervous at first, but when we got to know everyone in our classroom we felt relief. The teacher is very nice. She really understands students and gives us advice about everything to become good writers. Also, tutors in the Writing Center are available to help you out when you have a difficult time. It is fun to use the computer in the computer lab as well.

We encourage you to take the Basic Writing class because it is fun and soon you will find out that you can be successful in writing, too. Just keep that in mind. It will help you a lot when it comes time to do your homework. We just want to let you know that we can write better than we could three months ago. We really enjoy writing papers now.

Sincerely,
Jessica and Wassana

The Proposal
by Francisco Correa

How can something that seems so easy be so hard? You think in your head, "Well, that shouldn't be too difficult," and the next thing you know you're staring at the ceiling of your room cursing yourself for chickening out of what appeared to be a "simple" task. I once prepared myself for one. Little did I know the simpler a task seems in your mind, the harder it will be to actually do.

I play an internet video game, Final Fantasy XI. It's like a whole different world inside my computer. There are other players who, like me, make a character and interact with others from around the world. Other than the monsters, the magic, and the superhuman abilities, the game world isn't too different from the real world. There is a realistic economy and a currency, "gil," there are cities and towns where you can buy supplies or accept jobs for money or items, and there are even holidays and "event" parties where the cities celebrate with fireworks, mini-games, and special prizes.

One feature caught my eye. The game allowed players to marry their characters. I hadn't been playing the game for long when I heard about it. It sounded like a fun idea. I really wanted to see a wedding in the game world. The curiosity ate me from the inside. Awhile after I heard this, I had a friend whom I had a crush on. Her character name is Zelene, but her real name is Emma. We had been talking and playing together in game for a long time. I realized I developed feelings for her and decided to propose to her. I thought since it was only a game thing, it wouldn't be so hard. I was dead wrong though.

I paced my room wondering how I was going to do it for about an hour. I tried to ask her already but with no luck. I would get too nervous and chicken out. I logged on with a "come hell or high water" attitude, but I was still very nervous. "Tonight I ask her no matter what," I said to myself. I wasn't sure when the right time to ask her was. I figured maybe it would be better to ask as I'm logging out. That way I can escape any awkwardness if it doesn't work out. "Yeah, that'll work… I'm a coward," I said sighing at my realization. I shook it off and looked for her. When I found her, I gave her our usual greeting, "Heya, cursed princess."

She replied, "Hiya, knighted doom cloud."

"So, what are we doing today?"

"Don't you remember? We're going to get necklaces for your ninjitsu spell."

"O, yeah… damn," I replied. She had told me the day before that we were going to, but it slipped my mind because of everything I was planning for that day.

"Oh, come on. It's not that bad," she said sarcastically. "We just need to get 200 of them." I was used to her sarcasm. I like spending any time with her, but the sound of having to kill hundreds of Yagudo, a race of bird people, turned me off a little to the idea. Nonetheless, I still went to do the quest. I needed the money, and I needed to ask.

We headed out to a place called Giddeus. It's an outpost controlled by the Yagudo so we knew there were many of them there. It looks like a series of caves and caverns inside a small plateau. "We'll try and get 50 today," Emma said. She had done this quest before so she was calling the shots. "That way we can get another 50 each day for three more days."

"Okay, sounds good," I replied. I wasn't really looking forward to slaughtering weak monsters for four nights straight. I like killing monsters that are a challenge. "Do it for the money. Do it for the money. Do it for the money," I said. Knowing this quest was going to get boring fast, I kept the thought of selling that spell scroll for 700,000 gil.

She laughed, "Keep telling yourself that and it'll be worth it." I knew I could most likely kill those things with one hit. That was just boring to me. I figured instead of fighting them one on one, I would get a big group of them after me and kill them one by one that way. It was supposed to pose more of a challenge so I wouldn't get bored. It didn't work as well as I had hoped.

A couple of hours later, we had fallen a little short of our goal, but I was done. I couldn't take it anymore. I was getting drowsy, with my heart suddenly weighing about 70 pounds. I thought it was about time to ask her. "Well, I think I'm done for tonight," I said.

"Aw, but we only have like 45ish," she replied.

"I know, but if I kill one more of these damned things I'm going to crack," I said. I still killed a few more before I left though.

She laughed and said, "Okay, then I'll just keep going until I get the 50 for you."

She always wants to help me. I hate it when she offers to help me out. I feel like I'm taking advantage of her, but I knew she wouldn't take no for an answer. "Heh, fine, but I'm going to help you out someday in return."

"Like on what?"

"I don't know yet… but I will. Anyway, I have to go."

"I'll have the 50 for you by tomorrow," she reassured me.

My legs began to shake uncontrollably as hundreds of thoughts crowded my mind. It sounded like a high school lunchroom, hundreds of conversations going on, but you can't understand any one of them. "Okay, Cisco, it's now or never," I told myself. "Just do it and she'll answer, and you'll sleep a lot better tonight." I took a huge breath, and took another, and took one more. It was then I learned taking big breaths doesn't help.

"Um… one more thing before I go," I said. We type to talk through the game and I must've misspelled the word "thing" six times. My whole body was shaking.

"Oh? What's up?" she asked.

"Will… you marry me?" I asked and the lunchroom shut up. My mind was dead quiet. My body wouldn't stop shaking. I had prepared myself for four different answers: "yes," "no," "maybe," or "hell, no, and I never want to talk to you again." I was really hoping it wasn't the last one. There were more, but they were really just different ways to say those four.

She paused for a second and finally said, "Are you serious?" That had to be the only response that I couldn't see coming. It surprised me so much that I couldn't think of a good response.

Without thinking, I said, "Um… well, in game, obviously." Her question caught me off guard, but at least it removed a lot of the tension.

She laughed, "I know, I know." After a long uneasy pause, she finally said, "Sure." The instant I read that word, I fell back into my chair and let out a big sigh of relief.

"Heh, cool," I said. It was all I could really say. "Well, I have to go," I reminded her.

"Heh, yeah. We'll talk more about it tomorrow," she said, and I logged out of the game. I guess she was a little surprised by me asking. We had known each other for about a year and a half without anything like a relationship between us ever coming up in conversation.

With the question finally out and my head clearer, I slept like a rock that night. I didn't have to curse myself out. Emma figured out later my real intention behind proposing to her. We've been together for eight months. Armageddonx and Zelene, however, still haven't gotten married. The weddings are done on a lottery basis. I guess our luck isn't very good in that sense. I hope that isn't an omen or something. Emma and I joke that we would probably get married before they do.

Marriage proposals are hard. They take a lot of mental preparation. Even with that, surprises are inevitable. Even if you spend weeks, months, even years preparing for what you think will happen, you should also spend some time preparing for what you don't expect to happen. It may have made my uneasy moment a little easier if I added, "Are you serious?" to my list of possible responses.

*Francisco Correa, 19, likes to play video games and is working toward a career as an engineer or technician. Before taking Chris Pike's Basic Writing course in the fall of 2006, he didn't like writing. Now Francisco doesn't like writing more, but he finds it easier.*

Love is Friendship
by Stephanie MacLean

I remember sitting in Kristin's and Ryan's kitchen sipping wine and listening to Jack Johnson. We were planning our weddings. It was only a couple of years ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday. We were both getting married in the same month only two weeks apart. It was this night that Kristin and Ryan asked me to say a reading at their wedding. I didn't realize accepting one request would lead to teaching me one of life's greatest lessons.

Ryan told me, "As you know, Kristin and I decided to have our families in the wedding party. However, we would both be honored if you would say a reading at the wedding."

I said, "Of course I will. I would love to. Do you have anything in mind?"

Kristin responded, "Not just yet. Ryan and I are still looking through some books. We have narrowed it down to a few. I will have to get back to you on that."

A few weeks later, my fiancé and I called our wedding off. This was only weeks before Kristin and Ryan were to be married. I called Kristin with the news and she tried to tell me I didn't have to say the reading at their wedding. I really wanted to and insisted that I would still do it. I didn't want my misfortune to hinder her special day at all.

One week before the wedding, Kristin and Ryan finally gave me the reading. It was titled "Love Is." The poem was a very detailed description of someone's understanding of what love is. It was a beautiful poem and perfect for Kristin and Ryan now that I look back. However, at the time I had my own ideas of what love was. I had a very cynical attitude toward this poem. At times while trying to memorize it, I would place my own spin on it! I was really starting to worry that I would be able to do this after all.

Finally the wedding day was here, September 11, 2004. The sun was shining, the temperature was picture perfect, and I was a complete wreck! As I got ready, I tried reciting the poem. In the shower, while drying my hair, as I put on my make-up, I kept reciting the poem with this nasty attitude. My mom happened to walk by the bathroom as I was practicing.

She asked, "How are you holding up?"

I responded, "I am not so sure I can do this. I am so afraid I am going to recite my version instead of the words on the paper."

My mother responded, "You can do it. Just keep in mind who you are reading those words for."

I replied sarcastically, "Yeah, I suppose."

I finally finished getting ready and it was time to go pick up my date, my best friend, Scott. Scott is sort of a handsome fellow. He has dark curly brown hair, dark skin, and the most stunning blue eyes. Scott comes off as a hippy in some ways, but he really cleaned up good that day.

The ride to Scott's was quite long. I was so nervous. I kept getting cold sweats and nervous clammy hands. It was hard for me to grip the wheel. All these crazy thoughts kept running through my mind, "Would I cry? Would I remember the reading? What if I can't go up there?" I got so caught up in the reading that I missed my turn to Scott's road.

I arrived at Scott's and per usual he was late. I needed this like I needed a hole in the head. Scott's tardiness added more free time to sweat about this reading. I practiced the reading to Scott while he was in the shower. I kept trying to be serious, but the cynical version kept coming out of me.

He laughed and said, "Yeah, right? You are kidding me, right? There is no way you will be able to do this with a straight face."

The anxiety grew inside of me and I snapped back, "Thanks for the vote of confidence! This is just what I need at this stage of the game." Scott didn't respond. He stuck his head out of the shower curtain and looked at me.

He gave me this look that said, "Okay, kiddo, I am here for you."

While Scott dressed, I rummaged through his scarce-looking fridge. I knew I would find what I was looking for, a Corona. I needed to take the edge off a bit and couldn't drink too much as I was driving. Scott came down the stairs and saw me gulping down my beer and again laughed, but still with that same look he gave me from the shower. Schott told me I looked beautiful and we were on our way.

As we got into the car, Scott tried to take the reading from me. I held a tight grip on it as I planned to read along the way. Finally, by the third or fourth stop light, Scott won the tug of war. He had the reading; it was out of my hands now. Again with the look, he turned the radio to WBCN. Guns and Roses' "Sweet Child O Mine" was playing. Scott began singing the words of the poem to the music. He switched the radio station again, this time to MIX 98.5, singing it to whatever pop song was playing at the time. He continued to do this throughout all the stations ending it with a rap version of the poem. Scott was hysterical. I laughed so hard I thought I was going to wet my pants. Scott's little skit really helped to relax me.

We arrived at the Corinthian. The Corinthian is a country club located in Marblehead, MA, on the water. It was picturesque. Looking around the room, I began to think of all the moments that Kristin and I shared preparing for this very day. I smiled thinking of how much fun we shared looking through bridal magazines together. As I entered the room, I looked around and everything was just as Kristin had planned. The tables were covered with ivory linen tablecloths. In the center were blue oasis hydrangeas in galvanized buckets. Scott and I signed into her guest book, which was a coffee table book based in Nantucket. We walked around and mingled with friends, some of whom kept asking me how I was coping. It was at this time I wanted to go and find our seats. Scott and I sat, and I went right back to my poem. I kept reading it over and over, almost burning a hole in the paper with my eyes.

Before I knew it, the ceremony was beginning. I looked up to see my friend Kristin. She was stunning as she walked on the deck. She wore this beautiful ivory gown that was simple, yet elegant. Her hair was perfect and jet black. I glanced over to find Ryan standing there beaming with happiness. Ryan waited patiently, hands folded in front. Kristin and Ryan took each others' hands. They looked so comfortable with each other, so relaxed. It was then that I realized I needed to read those words for what they truly meant.

A few minutes later, I was called up to read my poem. On my way up the front to stand beside my friends, I began thinking. I thought back to all the good times and bad I had shared with my ex-fiancé. I thought about the could-have, would-have, and should-haves of our relationship together. It was at this time I knew things would never have

really worked out for us. However, standing only a few feet in front of me were two good people who clearly loved each other very much.

I stood up next to Kristin and Ryan, smiling at the two. It couldn't have been a more beautiful setting. We were on the deck in the sunshine. Out on the water were these gorgeous sailboats and yachts. The air was perfect temperature, about 70 degrees. The sea air smelled sweet and fresh. As I read the words, head held high with a smile upon my face, the waves slapped against the rocks below. I looked out to all of these people staring back at me. I felt good about myself. I knew I had done it. I read each and every word as they were intended. I spoke slowly and clearly, expressing each and every sentence in a bold fashion.

As I looked around at all of these people, some familiar and some not, I found Scott. Scott looked back at me with the same kind of look he had given me from the shower, only this time the look was a bit different, more happy, not so sad. It also included a nod of his head, a nod of his approval. He was proud of me, and that felt good. I was proud of me. I looked out to all of these people staring back at me. I felt good about myself. I knew I had done it. This reading was a new beginning for me. It showed me how strong I really was.

My experience that day taught me what love really is. Love is Scott trying to make me laugh and have fun at my good friend's wedding. Love is Kristin and Ryan supporting me through my difficult ordeal. Love is my happiness for Kristin and Ryan, and wanting only the best for the two despite my own misfortune. I read the words that were on the paper to Kristin and Ryan, however, with my own understanding of what they meant. Love is friendship.

*Stephanie MacLean, 32, lives in Salisbury, MA, and is working toward a career in business management. She took Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2006.*

An Unforgettable Trip
by Scarlett Perez

It was a cold but sunny February day when we left Lawrence High School. It seemed it was going to be perfect conditions for skiing; my friends and I from our Ski Club were on our way to Killington Mountain in Vermont for what was supposed to be one of the most exciting trips yet. We'd all become really close over the last couple of years and since this was our senior year, this was sort of our big farewell trip and we wanted to celebrate, but I could never have imagined how this trip was going to change my life.

Since we knew it would take a few hours for us to get to the ski lodge, some of us girls brought music, games, and magazines for entertainment, but our friend Ian said he'd brought something better. Hidden in his thermos, he had Jack Daniels. Ian, Stacy, Chris, and I drank a little on the way. I knew it was stupid and I was nervous about getting caught, but my best friends were enjoying themselves and I wanted to be a part of that.

By the time we arrived, the four of us were feeling a little tipsy. By now, it was snowing pretty heavily and visibility was poor, but it really didn't matter because we were excited to be there and determined to get some skiing in before it got too late. We unpacked our bags and settled in. The sun was setting, so it had started to get dark. Since we had been on the road for a few hours, some of our friends suggested that we just get some rest and get an early start in the morning. I insisted that I was going to get in some skiing no matter how tired I was. It had gotten too late to go on the cross-country trails, so we decided to take a few runs on the slopes.

It was a beautiful night. As Stacy and I rode up the mountain on the chair lift, the snow was falling and even though there were people everywhere, the night seemed so perfect and serene.

"Stacy, I don't know if I want to do this now. I feel a little drunk," I said.

"Come on. We're here to have a good time and Ian's waiting for us," she said.

When we reached the top, I had a slight feeling of hesitation. I'd been skiing for a long time and was very confident in my abilities, but this time I felt a little nervous because I was definitely feeling a buzz. Still, I was feeling daring and was determined to have some fun on the slopes.

Stacy and I went down first, and I couldn't really see too well because of the snow. Ian came after us, and the rest of what happened is really all just a blur. There was someone on the ground in my way, but I couldn't swerve fast enough to try and avoid hitting them because my reaction time wasn't that good. After that, I lost control. As I tumbled, snow hit my face and I felt everything around me was spinning then everything went blank after that.

The next thing I remember was a guy wearing a ski patrol uniform saying my name. I felt completely disoriented, and when I opened my eyes, everything looked blurry but I could make out a crowd of people around me. As I was trying to focus and talk, all of a sudden I felt the most excruciating pain in my left leg and I screamed.

"Try not to move," someone said. "Can you tell me where you're hurt?"

"My leg hurts the most," I said.

"Just try to lie still; we're on our way to the hospital. You're going to be all right," he said in a calming voice.

As I was riding in the ambulance, I wondered how this had happened and how I could have been so stupid. I was in so much pain, but I was also worried that everyone was going to find out I'd been drinking. When we arrived at the hospital, everything seemed to happen so fast. The doctor who came to talk to me was Dr. Wallace. He was a tall older man with a stern look about him, which intimidated me a little. He said I had broken my leg in two places and that I was going to need surgery, and then he asked how much I'd had to drink before this happened.

"Only a few sips," I told him. "Are you going to tell my mother?"

"Don't worry about that now; let's just work on making you better. We've notified your mother of the accident and she's on her way."

When I awoke, my body felt achy all over and my throat was very dry. I tried to focus but my vision was blurry. When I looked down at my leg, I saw it was all bandaged up. A few moments later, a nurse wearing blue scrubs and a stethoscope around her neck came to my side.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"A little bit groggy."

"You'll be fine. That will wear off," she said.

She said the doctor would be in to see me soon and that my mom had been waiting for me to wake up to come and see me. I started to cry when I saw my mom come in through the curtains around my bed. I could tell she'd been crying because her eyes looked red and puffy and she wasn't wearing any makeup. I wasn't even worried about my leg at this point. I just kept thinking how much trouble I was going to be in if they had told my mom about the drinking.

"Oh, honey, I'm glad you're okay. I was so scared and worried for you."

"Me, too, Mom," I said, still crying. She kissed and held me for a long time. She told me she'd talked to the doctor and that in time I was going to be fine.

The next day, my mom came into my hospital room and asked how I was feeling. "Okay," I said.

"There's something I want to ask you. Is it true that you and your friends were drinking?"

I felt like my whole world was collapsing around me, and I just started to cry and nodded my head.

"What were you thinking?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said.

She proceeded to express her disappointment in me and said we'd have to talk about all this with my dad. When I got home, my dad wasn't as hard on me as I thought he was going to be. I think he probably felt that everything I had been through was punishment enough.

I spent a long time in bed and it took eight months of rehab for me to be able to walk without crutches, which gave me a lot of time to contemplate the events that happened. I learned how your life can really change in an instant. After that incident, I didn't drink a sip of alcohol for many years, and I realized that the choices we make always have consequences. As it turned out, this trip really was unforgettable, but not in the way I had hoped it would be.

*Scarlett Perez is 36 and lives in Haverhill, MA. She works as a bartender, but she is studying to be a radiology technician. Before taking Donna McArdle's fall 2006 Basic Writing class, Scarlett was "terrified by the thought of writing essays." Now, however, she says, "I feel much more comfortable and at ease with the whole writing process."*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We are now in our twelfth week of the Basic Writing class. When we first started this class, we had the same fear and anxiety that you may have. We were concerned about how well we would do in this class. We now find ourselves better writers than when we started and we are looking forward to moving on to English Composition I.

One thing we would highly suggest is taking advantage of the Writing Center. When we were first told that we had to visit the Writing Center once a week, we weren't too happy. We were a little apprehensive about having people read our essays. The first time we visited the Writing Center, we weren't sure what to expect. We were afraid that maybe the tutors would be critical of our writing. We found that just the opposite happened. The tutors were helpful and encouraging. They gave us many great ideas and strategies. We found ourselves looking forward to going to the center and getting help when we were not sure where to go with our papers. The half hour extra a week we had to spend in the Writing Center turned out to be time well spent.

In order to maintain a decent grade in Basic Writing, you must always come to class and try to do your assignments. Follow your teacher's instructions. Don't hesitate to contact your teacher via email for any suggestions. We remember 12 weeks ago when we started Basic Writing, we thought that we were not going to make it because writing had always been an uninteresting subject for us since we were in high school. We can now assure you that our writing skills have been tremendously improved. In order to succeed in Basic Writing, you have to motivate yourself, work hard, and stay positive.

Don't be afraid of writing. First, start with a brainstorm or a freewrite. Everything will come to your mind about your topic. The freewriting will help you to get your ideas together. You can write without worrying about things like grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Don't stop to correct or edit. You will have a chance for revising and improving your draft later. Also what I love about Basic Writing is that you can use the Writing Center for help. They will help you with no questions asked. Don't be afraid of asking for help; you will get it.

As we have mentioned, writing is not always easy. If you come into this class with a positive attitude, you will do well. Be sure to take advantage of the Writing Center, your text books, and your teacher's advice, and you will do well. So relax, have fun, and get to writing!

Best regards,
Alex, Scott, and Raquel

It's Not Just Twang!
by Kimberly Hubert

Country music has come a long way from the twangy twang that everyone thinks of it. It has had such an impact on my life since I started listening to it six years ago while living in Florida. I have one radio station that I listen to since I moved back here to the Boston area. Country music radio station WKLB 102.5 teaches me to respect myself and others, to be intellectual, to give more of myself and my time, and to be motivated at home.

It's actually quite funny the way that I started listening to country music. My roommate, Debbie, was into country music since she was a little girl. I had always listened to hip hop or the latest bubble gum type of music. She tried and tried to get me to listen to her music whenever we were in the car. She said, "Just give it a chance. I really think you'd enjoy it."

I said, "I'm not listening to that crap. It's all about losing your wife, your dog, your house, and your truck. It's too depressing!"

She said, "I bet if you listen to just one song, you'd be hooked." One night when I was home alone I wanted to listen to the radio. I went over to turn it on. I noticed that one of her country CDs was lying by the CD player, so I decided to give it a chance. The first song I heard, I fell in love with. It was a young girl singing about her family and how they support and love her even if she makes mistakes and isn't perfect. I really related to it because I know that my family feels that way about me. Debbie was right. I've been hooked ever since.

To begin with, the country music that WKLB plays has really taught me to have respect for myself and other people. The lyrics that mostly all the songs entail are quite inspiring. None of the songs have lyrics that put down women in a derogatory way as some other types of music. One song in particular has really changed my life and my way of thinking. The song is "My Wish," sung by a group named Rascal Flatts. The lyrics read:

I hope that days come easy and moments pass slow,
And each road leads you where you want to go,
And if you're faced with a choice and you have to choose,
I hope you choose the one that means the most to you.
And if one door opens to another door closed,
I hope you keep on walking till you find the window,
If it's cold outside, show the world the warmth of your smile.

I hope you never look back, but you never forget,
All the ones who love you, in the place you left,
I hope you always forgive and you never regret,
And you help somebody every chance you get,
Oh, you find God's grace in every mistake,
And you always give more than you take.

When I first heard the song over the radio, a light went on in my head. The lyrics in the song were exactly how I felt and wanted to live my life. The song, to me, means to have respect for myself and that it will project onto other people.

In addition to the music WKLB plays, the radio personalities also make me use my brain. On the morning show, there is a segment they call The Brain Strain. Laurie from the morning show asks a trivia question. The questions are very amusing and sometimes I find myself actually wondering and needing to know what the answer is. I'll often yell out my answer and when someone calls in and gives the same answer, I know that my mind is actually working like everyone else's. If I don't get to hear the actual answer before I get to work, I find myself looking it up on the internet. Laurie gives the answer the following morning, but I find it fun to think of my own silly answers and researching them to see if I was right. One of the many questions was, "THIS mode of transportation carries more people every day than any other. What is it?" Do you think you know the answer? My answers were an airplane, a subway train, and a bus. The answer was an elevator. Even though some of the questions are silly or have silly answers, I feel that 102.5 helps me wake up my brain in the morning.

Besides all the fun the radio station has, they have an inspiring way to give back to the community as they support a number of charities. The radio hosts are always appearing at different locations around the Boston area and find a way to involve us listeners. Recently they held a St. Jude's Radiothon for children with cancer. Listeners were able to come and join them or make donations online or by phone. The radio station raised over $75,000. It was inspiring and I had to join in and donate some money myself. It wasn't much money but it really gave me a sense of pride. Coming up in May WKLB is hosting the 13th Annual Positive Spin for ALS. I hope to be able to donate my time for this event. WKLB's radio personalities really get me motivated and want to help out as much as I can.

Not only does the radio station motivate me to give back to humanity, they also motivate me in my housework as well. On what are typically my lazy Sundays, I turn on the radio at home and my body feels the energy from the radio station. I can't help but get up and moving. All my housework gets done rather quickly. I find myself dancing with the vacuum cleaner, broom, or mop. It's so much fun to hear all my favorite music and get my chores out of the way at the same time. One song that gets me moving is called "I Go Back," sung by Kenny Chesney who just so happens to be my favorite singer. When I hear these happy and upbeat songs on the radio, I can't help but be motivated.

I have a lot of fun listening to my favorite radio station at home, but on the other hand, while I'm driving, I find that it can be dangerous. While I'm driving on the highway, I tend to speed as I'm singing and enjoying the music. One time I was listening to a song by one of my favorite artists and when I looked down at the speedometer I was going 90 mph. It scared the life out of me. I realized that I really need to pay more attention to my driving while listening to the radio. I have since learned that maybe I shouldn't play it too loud. If it's not turned up all the way, I seem to have more control over my driving.

Even though some of my friends here in Boston give me a hard time about listening to WKLB country radio, I feel that it has truly inspired me spiritually. WKLB is always on my car radio and when my friends get in they have no choice but to listen to it. I have even caught a few of them humming along to some of the songs. If given a chance,

I believe the music and personality that comes from one little radio station can change the world. I don't think that WKLB realizes how much they have an effect on their listeners. As for me, when I listen to the radio and all the wonderful music, it makes me a happier person. The music also makes me want to be a better person. I think it reflects in all of my relationships at home, at school, and at work.

*Kimberly Hubert, 30, lives in Haverhill, MA, and is studying business management so that she can become an event planner. About Clare Thompson-Ostrander's spring 2007 Basic Writing class, Kimberly says, "I really enjoyed and took a lot with me after taking this class."*

Connecting to the World
by Melissa Legere

When I was about 11 years old, I was introduced to the internet. I would go to my grandparents' house and use their computer. My grandmother showed me how to get on the internet and all the sites and places I could go. There are so many options out there just waiting for me at the click of the mouse. Ever since the internet was invented it has made my life so much easier. I never thought that anything could be this easy. Because of this brilliant technology, I can pay bills, shop for just about anything, and keep in contact with friends and family that live far away.

Before the introduction of paying my bills online, I used to have to mail them. I would have to buy stamps and go to the post office. Now all I need to do is log on and with the click of a button I have paid my mortgage or phone bill, and I don't have to worry about the check getting lost in the mail. I can even check on my next due date instead of waiting for the statement to come in the mail. I can do all this while in the comfort of my own home. I know that my payment will be there on time and I can check back later to make sure that it was processed. I remember once when I realized that I hadn't paid my credit card bill. It was due that day and I thought, "What am I going to do? I don't want to be charged a late fee." Then I remembered that I could sign up online and pay my bill and it would be credited that day, so I jumped on the computer and I signed up. Once I was done with registering, they showed me where to go to the bill pay section of the website. All it took was a few clicks and my bill was paid, and I didn't incur any late fee. Boy, was I happy and relieved that I wasn't late with my payment. Now I pay my bills all the time online and it helps me to spend more time with my family.

In addition to paying my bills online, I can also do one of my favorite things, SHOP! All of my favorite stores are on the internet. From Old Navy to Yankee Candle, they are all there. I love going from store to store with the click of the mouse and not having to worry about waiting in line or if the store is going to be crowded. I am shopping in the comfort of my own home and I don't even need to get out of my pajamas. Shopping online is wonderful, especially at Christmas time. I can find lots of deals on the internet and I don't have to fight someone for the last Barbie doll in the store. The best

part of shopping on the internet is also that I don't have to lug around all my purchases. They are all delivered right to my doorstep. It was just the other day that I was on the Old Navy website surfing to see if they had anything new on there. That is when I saw that they had this great pair of pants. They had my size and they even had the length that I needed. I have trouble finding pants that are long enough for me because I am tall so I was really excited to find these. I was also excited to find that they were on sale. It only took a few minutes to buy them and, to my surprise, two days later I had them on my doorstep. I tried them on and they fit perfectly. I was really happy about this. I have a lot of fun shopping on the internet because it has made my life so much easier that I can focus on other things in my life.

When I am done shopping online, I also like to keep in touch with my family and friends that live far away through email. I can send them anything from pictures to birthday cards. I love seeing if I have a little envelope on my computer screen when I log in every day. I don't need to spend hours writing down how my day was and getting writer's cramp. All I need to do is move my fingers over the keyboard and the letters start appearing like magic. I don't even need to be the best speller because they have a wonderful feature in email called spell check. I can even set up to have instant messaging, too. I am notified when any of my friends or family is on the internet and I can have a conversation with them while I am exploring other sites on the web. I love using email to talk because I don't really like the phone. There are always moments of silence when I am on the phone, and with email I just type and send. I feel that my feelings come out better through typing rather than speaking. The other day I was talking to my friend Stephanie's mother, Mary. Stephanie just recently passed away so I like to check on her mother to see how she is and to tell her that I am thinking of her. On the phone I think that I would be more emotional, and I don't want her to think that I am rushing the conversation; that is why I send quick little emails to let her know that I am here and I was thinking of her today. This is such a great way to communicate my feelings to someone or to send a note to cheer them up. This especially helps me because all I need to do is send an email to someone and let them know how I am feeling at that moment and they can respond right away with something that will help me cheer up.

While it may be true that the internet has a lot of great features, it can also have some negative effects on my life. It can cause me to not spend enough time with my family, especially if I use the internet every day. I will admit that I do go on the internet every day and check my email, but it is fun to play around on the computer and shop, though it still is fun to do things the old-fashioned way, too. That is actually going into a store or walking to the post office. It is even fun to actually pick up the phone and talk to someone. I get hung up with the internet because it is so easy to use but it is a powerful tool that can also be a dangerous one. I for one will try to not let the ease of using the internet make me a lazy person. Even though I can get addicted to shopping online because it is convenient, I will still make it a point to go to the mall or pick up the phone and make a call to a family member or friend and tell them that I am happy that they are in my life. It can also be a little intimidating to someone who is not computer literate. For instance, I remember when my mother first got on the internet. She had no idea what she was doing. She would call me all the time at work and tell me that she thought she broke the computer. I would see my mother's phone number come up on the phone at work, and I would pick up the phone and immediately say, "What is the matter?"

She would say, "The internet is not working. I don't know what I did wrong."

I said, "Have you made sure that you plugged in the phone internet connection cord to the phone jack on the wall?"

She said, "Oops, I forgot. Thank God. I thought that I broke it."

She is a much better user now, but I don't think that she would have kept using it if I wasn't there to help her along the way.

Even though there are negative qualities about the internet, I feel that it still is an important tool in this day and age. Without it, I believe work would take longer. It would not be as easy to find something or someone. Instead of sending someone a quick email, I would need to make a telephone call, which costs money and most of the time can get me off the subject of my original reason for calling. I will continue to use the internet because I would be lost without it; however, I will be more mindful of how much of my life is controlled by it.

*Melissa Legere, 28, lives in Amesbury, MA, with her husband, Steve. Her NECC major is business management. Melissa took Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class in the fall 2006 semester. At first, she says, "I dreaded writing. I thought that it was painful." After completing Basic Writing, Melissa explains, "Now that I understand how to write, I enjoy it a lot more and feel that I am better at it."*

A Simple Life Through the Internet
by Tammy Nadeau

The internet has the most impact on my life because I have access to the news, weather, shopping, and entertainment at any time of the day. It has taken the place of watching television for this reason. The internet first came into my life in the year 1997. My sister taught me how to use a computer and browse different websites on the internet. Shortly after, my dad purchased our first computer for the family to use. I use the internet more than I should in my spare time. I probably spend about three hours or more a day on the internet. The internet is a medium that provides me with hours of communication among friends and family, a good source of education, and a helpful support system.

First of all, the internet is a great new way for me to communicate with friends and family. I use the internet to keep in touch with everyone through email and instant messaging. Instant messaging is particularly great because I can talk at that very moment to someone far away or nearby. It is just like talking over the phone, but instead I am typing. It's a great opportunity to practice my typing skills. My friend moved up to New Hampshire a few years after our high school graduation. Every morning we talk through instant messaging so we don't wake our children up with the phone ringing. This saves us both on our long-distance phone bill. Communicating through email is so much faster than postal mail. I save money from buying stamps. The cost of the internet is a decent price because you pay a flat fee every month and you have unlimited access. It also saves me time from driving to a mailbox to send out letters. The best way to keep in touch with my aunt and uncle is through email. They travel often, so they usually have a laptop computer with them wherever they are to access the internet. I usually send a couple emails a month to keep them updated on how my family and I are doing. With email, everything is at a click of a button, and it's on the way to the recipient within minutes.

Also, I use the internet as an educational source. It is like a library right from my own home. I don't need to worry about whether the library is open because I have access through the internet any time of the day. I research different topics that arise in my daily life. My daughter was born with acid reflux disease and several allergies. Having access to information on these medical issues is very helpful. Sometimes libraries don't have enough books to cover the topic that is being researched, yet the internet may have more information. One website I was able to find some information on my daughter's egg and peanut allergies is www.foodallergy.com. This site is very informative; it has allergen-free recipes, allergy alerts on food products, and a special link for children to learn from. This site also has a membership for a reasonable fee, which allows me to have monthly newsletters sent to my house by postal mail or email. The only issue about doing research on the internet is that not all information is accurate. It should not be the only source of information when dealing with medical issues. Having access to this site has made it easier for me to adapt to my daughter's sensitive lifestyle. I am able to cook peanut and egg-free foods for her from the recipes I find, and learn about ingredients in food products.

Last but not least, I use the internet as a great support system. The internet has come in good use for me in the past year. After having my gastric bypass surgery I am supposed to attend support group meetings offered at Newton-Wellesley Hospital.

Sometimes I am unable to attend the meetings because of the schedule and the distance from my house. I signed up as a member of the support group the internet offers. I am able to keep in touch with others across the country who have had the same surgery, or who are thinking of having it done. I had a complication arise eight months out of surgery; I would stand up and just collapse to the floor. I placed my symptoms on the group's message board, and I got several replies for me to go to the emergency room or to call my surgeon. There were even a few people who wrote back about having the same symptoms, and it was good to know that I wasn't the only one going through this. It made me feel better knowing this happens to other people, and it is not life threatening. I took their advice and went to the emergency room. The doctors did some tests on me and diagnosed me with orthostatic hypotension. My body doesn't hold enough fluids so I dehydrate easily. When I stand up, my blood pressure drops if I don't have enough fluid, and this causes me to collapse. Having this support group right from my home is very accommodating.

In conclusion, if it wasn't for my sister, I probably wouldn't be up to date with using the internet. I probably would still be sending letters to my friends and family by the old-fashioned way. I never really used the library before the internet, so I probably wouldn't learn much information about my daughter's medical issues. Also, I would have no choice but to find time to attend the support meetings at the hospital. Overall the internet has become one of the important forms of media in my life.

*Tammy Nadeau is a 30-year-old single mother who lives in Groveland, MA. She works as a certified nurse's aide and is studying to be a radiology technician. Until Tammy took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2006, she felt nervous and uncomfortable about writing. Now she has more confidence.*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We are writing to you today to give you advice on how to complete Basic Writing successfully. Three concerns you may have could be keeping up with assignments, your writing skills, and sharing your life experiences with others. These concerns are normal and we will guide you through them.

Keeping up with your assignments is the key to doing well. To write a good paper, you need to leave yourself time to accomplish your assignment goals. A well written paper takes time, so spend your time wisely! Do not wait until the last minute because your work will not be as good as it could be. Use the Writing Center. The tutors help you expand your ideas and make a better paper. You can sit with a tutor one-on-one, and they will give you feedback on your paper and give you suggestions on how your paper can be improved.

Your writing skills may be another concern you have, such as organizing your paper, giving examples about your topic, and grammar. Don't worry! Your skills will improve. This is what this class is all about. The teacher will go over everything step by step and guide you all the way. The more you write, the more your skills will improve because you will become more familiar with the proper way to write essays.

The last concern you may have is sharing your life experiences with others. The best advice is to write what you know, such as writing about life experiences. When you write about what you know, you can be more expressive in your work. Writing from the heart can lead to a very well written essay and can also be very therapeutic. Seeing your ideas on paper can be very liberating and eventually you will be expressing yourself through writing.

In conclusion, we hope we have helped you understand what will be expected of you in Basic Writing. Just stay focused, don't do things at the last minute, be confident in your writing skills, and always write what you know. You'll be fine if you follow our advice.

Good luck,
Amanda and John

A New View on Bachata
by Karol Falzareno

Growing up I never was interested in Spanish music. Never did I think Bachata would intrigue me considering I spoke very little Spanish. During these past few years, however, I've been around more Spanish-speaking people and my boyfriend Alberto's family who are all from the Dominican Republic. It was at the beginning of our relationship when he introduced me to Bachata. We were at his goddaughter's one-year birthday party and a group named Aventura was playing. I asked him, "What's the name of this song?"

He said, "Well, this song is called 'Un Beso.' Why? You like it?"

I replied, "Yes, I love it! This music is so good, but I don't understand any of it!"

He said, "Well, we'll work on it if you want to keep listening to it and I'll help you translate it."

From that point on, he has been working with me on my Spanish and has broadened my horizons on the music I listen to. Since that day, Bachata and all types of Spanish music have become my music of choice. Listening to Bachata has influenced me by helping me connect better to my boyfriend, helped me form a bond with people I have come to love, and has helped me feel happy and relieved.

This type of music attracts me for a few reasons. When I listen to Aventura, I feel like they really sing from the heart, and it sounds so different from the other music I'm used to hearing. The group Aventura consists of four men. They have their unique sound and use the instruments like the segunda, or rhythm guitar, and the guira, which is a type of bass guitar, and they also use an amplified guitar. They use a native drum called the bongo drum, which solidifies the basic beat of the song and at the same time provides percussive accents to the song, which occurs before the core of the song. This group really uses their talents by bringing out the culture in their music by using these instruments.

The connection between my boyfriend and I has become so much stronger since I have started to listen to Bachata. The song I really enjoy listening to is called "Un Beso," by Aventura. The title of the song means "one kiss." It is a love song and the first song I heard from that genre when I was with Alberto. When I first heard it, I can remember how I felt, and it always makes me smile. It was the first time I had met Alberto's whole family and they were so inviting. In their Spanish culture, music is what brings people together and being a part of it and sharing it with his family meant so much to me. To this day, we listen to this song together once a month on the day that we made "us" official. Now that I have been around them for almost a year, I have been able to understand more Spanish and I can listen to Spanish music and enjoy it. I really like the beat of the music and the vocals of the artists in the group Aventura.

Having the ability to learn another person's culture and truly understand it is extremely special. I've been able to listen to all types of Spanish music and it is very different. I don't think of it as just noise now. I can pick up on words and, listening to how the artist sings the song, I can tell what they are singing about. I never thought I would be able to understand Spanish music, let alone like it. I've learned how to do both, which has helped me form stronger bonds with people I love and have come to love.

After learning and listening to Spanish music, it makes me want to really learn more Spanish so I can speak Spanish fluently.

Being able to understand Bachata has helped me form a bond with Alberto's family, whom I have come to love. Bachata has taught me better rhythm and to dance different types of steps. Bachata was the first type of dance I learned while listening to the song "Un Beso." This dance was difficult for me to learn at first. Alberto, however, helped me with these steps all the time. Since his family is so into music and owns many clubs, we can go and dance these steps any time we want. Through the Spanish music and my dedication to learn to appreciate Bachata, I have become even closer with his family because music is the key thing that brings them together.

Listening to Bachata always puts a smile on my face and makes me feel so relieved. Anytime I feel down or if I get into any type of argument with Alberto, I'll listen to Bachata and it's like the arguing never happened. I can remember a time when Alberto and I were driving to Springfield together not that long ago. We got into an argument over something so small. For at least a half hour we sat there and refused to speak to each other. Then I played a CD he made for me at the beginning of our relationship, and he looked at me and said, "Thank you."

I said, "Well, this is a two-hour drive. I'd rather listen to this CD than have complete silence." He chuckled, took my hand, and started to sing. We decided from that point on not to argue over little things because it's not worth it. The whole ride he was just singing, and I remember only knowing maybe five songs on the CD, since it had 35 songs total. I think the reason Bachata always makes me feel better is because I have so many memories tied to the music so I like to reminisce about the past with Alberto.

I never realized that I could get so much out of music. Before I met Alberto and before I was introduced to Spanish music, I never really thought too deeply about the music I listened to. Most of the time I just listened to whatever came on the radio or what my friends wanted to listen to. After really finding a type of music I enjoy, I have learned how to make myself feel happy and relieved just by listening to a song I enjoy. Music in my life now means so much more than I thought it could. I can't go a day without listening to music just because it makes me start off the day with a smile on my face. In the morning, it really wakes me up and it is always fun to listen to. Music has done so much for me from helping connect me with Alberto to helping me form a strong bond with the people I have come to love, and, lastly, it just makes me happy when I listen to it.

*Karol Falzareno, 19, lives in Georgetown, MA, and is a business management/hospitality major. She was in Joanna Fortna's spring 2007 Basic Writing class. Karol enjoys playing sports and being with her family and friends. After completing Basic Writing, she says, "I'm more confident in my writing. My ideas flow and I can make sense of what I write."*

Eternal Break Samba
by Patricia Jeffries

Samba is a Brazilian music with roots in Africa. My mother was the one who introduced me to Samba. I grew up listening to her sing this type of music. There are several kinds of Samba. My mother's favorite one was the Samba Cancao, a kind of gentle and romantic Samba, usually played with a "cavaquinho" (a small guitar) and a "pandeiro" (a type of hand-framed drum). She owned a collection of Samba records (33 LP albums), and part of her collection were albums of a Samba called Samba Breque (Break Samba), which was my favorite. Samba Breque are funny songs with spoken dialogue in the middle of the lyrics and the music. That's why it is called "breque" (a slang for the English word, break); the song is interrupted for the spoken parts. Samba songs are funny, melancholic, romantic, and energetic. Samba is a kind of music that makes me laugh, brings me fond memories of my mother, and gives me a lot of energy while doing my housework.

To begin with, Samba Breque are funny songs about the everyday life of simple folks. A particular one, from the several I like and which make me laugh, is about the end of the world, "E o mundo nao se acabou" ("The world was not finished"). The song was composed by Assis Valente and sung by the famous Carmen Miranda. This song is about the composer and his family's reaction when they heard that the world was coming to an end: "They have announced and they have guaranteed that the world went to a finish itself. For this reason, my family back in the house started to pray. Until they had said that the sun went to be born before the dawn." Some of the composer's family members started to pray, others believed that the sun was going to rise a way before the morning, and he (the composer) decided to forgive and go party with his worst enemy. He spent all his money on this guy. He brought lots of drinks for this guy, and he danced with the same guy all night long. It ends up that the world never ended, and he felt foolish because the guy was all over the town gossiping and lying about things that never happened between them during the night they partied. I like this song because it is funny and it makes me laugh a lot. When I am in a bad mood, Breque Samba is a kind of song that makes me laugh.

Most of all, I have to mention my mother's favorite type of Samba, the Samba Cancao. My family was very poor, but my mother used to make ends meet. A music that reminds me of her was also one that she used to sing a lot. The Samba's name was "Ai que saudades de Amelia" ("Ai who is homesick for Amelia") from a famous, now deceased, Brazilian singer and composer named Ataulfo Alves. The singer sang about his former wife, Amelia. He compares Amelia with the new woman that he is married to: "You do not know what conscience is. I am a poor youngster. You only think about luxury and wealth. Everything that you see, you want. Ai, my God, who is homesick for Amelia." Amelia was an understandable woman, who never complained about being poor, and, also, she always had words of hope for better times. The composer's new wife is very demanding. She doesn't understand that he is a hard worker and he tries to do his best to be a good provider. My mother used to sing this song a lot and I think there was a little bit of "Amelia" in her. This song is very special to me because it reminds me of my late mother.

In the same way, Samba makes me do my housework in a breeze. I like to listen to Samba de Pagode (Pagode Samba) while I am doing house cleaning. Samba de Pagode is a kind of agitated type of Samba and it makes my body move rapidly. The sound of the pandeiro and cuica (another kind of Brazilian drum) has some kind of energetic feeling. I like to listen to Samba de Pagode when I am cleaning my house. Pagode Samba energizes my body. The cuica's repercussion and the vibrant sound of the pandeiro give me an energizing feeling. As mentioned, last week I was overwhelmed with a lot of school homework and I did have no desire to do housework. I decided to play one of Zeca Pagodinho's (another famous Brazilian Samba composer) songs, "O Samba e pra todos" ("Samba is for all"): "The Samba is a tradition that expends energy. The Samba is for all, the rich and the poor. It raises the dust. It is in the life of people." Zeca Pagodinho's song leveled my energy and I finished my housework in a snap. Samba de Pagode has a great energizing feeling and helps me to do my housework when I am so tired.

To say it again, Samba is my favorite type of music. Samba is a kind of music that makes me laugh, brings me fond memories, and gives me lots of energy. When I listen to the funny "Samba Breque," even if I am "with the blues," this type of Samba makes me laugh. It is an excellent therapy for "bad mood." The gentle and romantic Samba, the Samba Cancao, reminds me of my mother. She loved to sing "Ai que saudades da Amelia," and this song reminds me of her so fondly. The Samba de Pagode, with the repercussion of the cuica and a pandeiro, which is very intense, gives me a lot of energy and I do my housework in a flash. No doubt, Samba has significance in my life.

*Patricia Jeffries, 41, lives in Lawrence, MA, with her husband and 12-year-old son. She was born in Brazil and enjoys reading. Patricia took Wendy Leeman's spring 2007 Basic Writing class and notices her writing is more organized since she has completed the course.*

The Wonder in My Life
by Ashley Woodward

Since I was very little, music has been a big part of my life. I have grown up listening to oldies and found many radio stations over time that play that kind of music. Although at first I did not realize who Stevie Wonder was, or anyone besides the Beatles for that matter, I do not think I even knew his name, all I knew was I liked the songs "Uptight" and "You Are the Sunshine of My Life." Then one day a couple of years ago, some commercial used one of his songs, "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," and my mom started talking about him and thought I should check him out a bit. She got me really excited and I was interested in listening to some of his stuff. Since then he has become one of my favorite artists who I listen to all the time. I love his music for many reasons. It cheers me up and keeps me going if I am feeling down, it gives me a boost when I need a little extra energy or motivation, and if I'm feeling lonely or just need something to comfort me when I have nothing to do.

When I put on one of Stevie Wonder's songs, like "If You Really Love Me" or "Nothing's Too Good for My Baby," I hear so many different qualities. There are the percussion which he uses in a lot of his music like drums and tambourines. They usually hold the beat, which is true for many musical groups, but he is different. When I listen to his music, I can really hear the drums. They are not just a background sound and they put the finishing touch on the energy I love so much about his music. Also there is his harmonica, which he plays in so many of his songs. Although when he is playing a harmonica solo he is not singing, it almost feels like he is and he has such feeling and emotion in each one. I know when I am singing along to a song when he gets to a harmonica solo, I hum it almost like it is a verse of the song. Another instrument that plays a large part in his music is the piano. Unlike many musical groups and artists that I listen to, the piano kind of takes the backseat to some other instruments like percussion and the harmonica that I mentioned earlier, but I still know it's there and it is just one more of the aspects that pulls everything together in his songs. A couple more sounds that he uses are the guitar, horns such as the trumpet, and the chorus. All these qualities come together and make such full and animated songs, and they are what keep me going each day.

One thing that I really love about his music is its rhythm. It is so upbeat and has so much energy, and I just have to sing along and dance to the beat. When I listen to the music, it blends so well with the melody and yet still stands out. In the song "Superstition," I can hear an electric guitar throughout the whole song that I almost think is more of a dominant quality than Stevie Wonder's voice. It connects all other qualities of the song together, and I think makes the song what it is today.

When I am just not having a good day and I am feeling really down, Stevie Wonder is always there to pick me up a bit. There is just something about his energy that gives me a boost and keeps me going. One of my favorite songs is "If You Really Love Me." Something about the strength he puts into this song always makes me feel better. There is something in the lyrics, too. Here are part of them: "I see the light of your smile/Calling me all the while/You are saying baby/It's time to go…/First the feeling's alright/Then it's gone from sight/So I'm taking out this time to say/Oh if you really love me won't you tell me…/Then I won't have to be/Playing around no." Even though he

seems to be in a bad situation, I feel this power and defiance; it is like even if she does not love him he will still be okay. That is what I love most about this song and that is what really gives me motivation. It makes me feel like no matter what happens I will still be all right. One evening I was putting my three dogs to bed after a rough day, I had had a lot of school work to do, and it rained all day. As I opened the door to release the dogs to freedom, the backyard, I thought about how much homework I still had to do the next day. The dogs yipped frantically at a squirrel outside. Since I knew that the dogs would be occupied for a while, I put my iTunes on and decided to listen to some Stevie Wonder. I think I listened to "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" and "If You Really Love Me." I just sang my heart out while I was waiting and it took all my problems away. I felt so alive. Listening to those songs fixed my whole day right there.

Another way in which I find help in Stevie Wonder is with my homework. Sometimes I am just not getting into my homework and not getting anything done. When this happens, I often listen to Stevie Wonder. Something about the strength and energy I feel in his music, both with its sounds and lyrics, gets me started and I am able to move through it. His music provides a place of enjoyment within something that does not really appeal to me. It gives me that extra oomph I sometimes need. One time I was doing my Spanish homework and I was just going so slowly. Nothing was making sense and I really needed to get it done. I decided to listen to some Stevie Wonder and that is all I needed. It put a little life into my homework and made it more bearable and human almost.

Sometimes when I am at home alone while my parents are at work and my brother still at school, I like to escape to Stevie Wonder's music. I might be feeling lonely or I might just be in need of something to do to make myself feel more like I'm doing something, less idle. Somehow when I listen to his music, I feel like I am doing more than just listening to music; I become part of the song, the story he is telling. It is like reading a book. It envelopes me in its energy and emotion. I go about the house feeding the dogs, cleaning up, or doing the dishes, but I am only half conscious of that. I just feel at one with myself no matter what I am doing. This might indeed be what I love the most about his music because I just get such a rush of happiness when I am listening to it.

All in all, Stevie Wonder is an amazing person with amazing talent. He has shown me real passion and energy, cheered me up when I really needed it, given me true motivation, and kept me company and amused when I am bored. All these things build up to what makes one of my favorite and most important singers in my life.

*Ashley Woodward, 17, is from Amesbury, MA, and is a general studies major at NECC, hoping to enter the field of architecture. She was in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2007. Describing how she felt before taking the course, Ashley says, "I had no self-confidence." However, after completing the course, she adds, "I'm well on my way to writing very strong Comp. I papers."*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We once sat where you are sitting now, with probably a lot of the same worries and concerns you are having. Although a writing class sounds scary, we have found it to be easier than you may think. The most important things to do are be prepared to get personal, don't stress about your skills, and always keep up with your assignments.

Although you may be hesitant to share your personal experience with strangers, it is not as painful as it sounds. As a matter of fact, the more you do it in class every week the more comfortable you feel. Our first assignment was selecting an object that meant something to us. I instantly thought of my grandmother's ring. I knew the way I felt about missing my grandmother would come out when writing about the ring. I was petrified to have strangers hear my personal thoughts. As I started writing about my memories, I realized that I was proud of the way I felt towards the object and I wanted to share my story with other people. We also had another assignment called the person essay. I was petrified about sharing the person I chose. The reason why I was scared about choosing my brother was because he is handicapped and I was scared how my classmates would react. As the time drew near for me to share my person essay, I immediately knew why I chose that person. When I told the class about him, they didn't think badly about him at all. He had impacted my life in general, and I wouldn't have been here today without him.

As you go through this course you will find that it is outlined very well. The instructor stays on course and gives you exercises to do while in class. These exercises help you get organized and help with getting new ideas for your writing assignments. Also, they help by giving you more courage about how good you are as a writer even though you don't think you are good. There is a lot more material to learn in Basic Writing than in high school. You will learn more ways to correct grammar mistakes. You will also learn how to put dialogue in your essays to make them better than they already are. Overall, these exercises helped us maintain an understanding to our work.

One of the most important pieces of advice that we have to pass on is always keep up with your journals. Once you fall behind it is so hard to catch up. I use my journal assignments as practice for my writing essays. When I need ideas, I pull out my journal and reference what I have written for my handed-in essays. It's like killing two birds with one stone. You could also use your journal pages to write about happenings in your life or stuff going on around the world.

In conclusion, we would like you to know how much we enjoyed this Basic Writing class. All of the worries and concerns are understandable, but please know that this course is not scary and you will realize a lot about yourself. Remember, the most important steps in Basic Writing are to be prepared to share personal experiences, don't get stressed about your writing skills, and always keep up with your assignments.

Best regards,
Kim and Jeremy

How to Build Realistic Military Models
by Andrew Bolduc

Building models can be a fun but difficult process. There are many techniques and skills involved when building models. It can be difficult to know where to start and what steps to take. From four years of experience, I have discovered an effective process of building models. As a skilled modeler, I follow a series of steps that enable me to successfully represent an accurate model. Such a long and overwhelming process can be broken down into simple steps. These steps include doing research, preparing the pieces, gluing, painting, applying the wash, dry brushing, and adding the final touches.

Before you can start the process, you must purchase the model or models you want to build, depending on if you are just building one model or a diorama. A diorama may include many vehicles, figures, buildings, or structures. There are many different models and model categories to choose from. Pick one that interests you the most. There are various scales of models. The most common one and the one that I choose is 1/35 scale. It's the perfect size for me. It's not too big and not too small. If you are using multiple models for a diorama, make sure that all the models are the same scale.

The best place to buy models is from a hobby shop. Hobby shops may have different products for many other hobbies, but they usually specialize in models. The price of models may vary, depending on scale, quality, or the contents of the model. I recommend buying a high-quality model because it is more accurate, it has more detail, and building it is more enjoyable because of that. Better quality also means less sanding and correction of pieces. As with most products, the price usually tells you what quality the model is, but you will also know what is high quality from experience by buying from different companies. A high-quality model of 1/35 scale, a tank for example, will cost you between $35 and $45. Aside from the model, you will need the right color of paints. You can choose acrylic or enamel. Deciding between these two is usually just the modeler's preference, but enamel paints are better suited to dry brushing techniques. You will also need a few different types and sizes of brushes, sandpaper, fine cutters, a hobby knife, model putty, paint thinner, lacquer thinner, flat clear lacquer, gloss clear lacquer, liquid cement, pastel powder, and I would highly recommend an airbrush, which will give a fine, smooth, accurate paint finish. A high-quality airbrush will cost you a couple of hundred dollars. A compressor for the airbrush, of equal quality, will cost about the same. All of these supplies can be found in the hobby shop where you buy the model and are designed for model use.

After you have purchased the model, spend a good amount of time researching your model and its history. Gather as much information as you can on the topic. You can use photos, videos, books, and the internet for research. Decide exactly what you want to do before you start building the model. Research will make building the model enjoyable and educational. When I research a particular model, I learn new things that can be applied to the model when built. Research gets me into the topic, making it more fun. I remember building a German armored car. I searched on the internet and found some high-quality pictures that enabled me to scratch build details that the model didn't include.

The next step is preparation of the pieces. After you are done with the research, look over the instructions to get an idea of how the model will be built, and it will make the process of building it easier. When you are ready, cut off the pieces from the runners (or tree), which is the plastic that connects all the pieces together, with sharp hobby cutters. Do not twist the pieces off, as it may ruin them. Next, sand off any excess plastic or seam lines on the pieces. This will feel like a boring and tiresome task, but it is worth it. Sanding off seam lines left over from the molding process makes the model look more like the real thing.

Now you can begin gluing the pieces together. Remember not to use too much glue. Use liquid cement, which is specifically designed for model use because it will bond the plastic together. Use a toothpick or glue bottle with a precision applicator attached to apply glue to small areas. Wait long enough for the glue to dry. Then use putty to fill any gaps that are visible. Wait long enough for the putty to dry also. When it is dry, sand off the excess putty so it is smooth and flush with the plastic.

Now you are ready for painting. When you are ready to paint, make sure you have decided ahead of time how and what you are going to paint. For example, know what colors you have to use and where. You can find all the paints you need where you bought the model. First you want to spray a light basecoat of the color over the whole model. If you want, you can spray a darker shade of that color over the model and then spray the actual color only in the middle of the panels, so the darker basecoat will show through on the panel lines, giving it a shading effect. This step can be skipped because there are techniques that can be done later to create this effect. After the basecoat is done, spray any other colors or camouflage scheme that you desire.

Now it's time to "wash" the model. When the model is completely painted, it is not the end of the modeling process. These last steps are some of the most important steps in building realistic looking models. First you will want to spray a coat of clear gloss lacquer with the airbrush to give the model a smooth surface in preparation for the wash. Let it dry for a day. The importance of the gloss coat is to allow the wash, when applied, to flow through the recessed areas on the model by itself. You can find the lacquer where you bought the model. The wash is a technique that is used to simulate shadow and depth to recessed areas and corners on a model. It is made with a ratio of about three parts thinner to one part paint. Unlike paint, the wash is a very thin solution. Use a brush to soak up the solution and dab it on the recessed areas. The thinness of the wash, with the smooth surface from the gloss lacquer, will cause the solution to travel down the recessed areas, doing the work for you. When the model is completely washed, wipe off any excess of the wash and let it dry for a few hours.

The next step is dry brushing. When you are completely done with the wash, the model must be sprayed with a flat, clear lacquer to give it a flat, dull finish in preparation for dry brushing. The dry brushing technique works best on a flat, dull surface. Wait a day for the lacquer to dry. Now mix together the color of your model with white to make a lighter shade of that color. Next, dip your brush in that color and get as much paint off the brush as you can, so there is hardly any paint on it. Now you will roughly but carefully dab and scrape the brush along any of the raised areas and in the middle of any panels. This gives the effect that the corners and raised areas are naturally being worn away by weather and use. There are also some other important detailing steps done at this time, like paint chips and pastel powder. Use a small brush to apply tiny metal or rust-

colored scratches to frequently used areas or areas that tend to receive a lot of damage on models such as tanks. Pastel powder can be applied with a brush to create rust streaks under bolts and handles, gunpowder residue on the end of a tank barrel, or exhaust buildup from exhaust pipes. It can also be mixed with paint thinner to create a thick, muddy type mixture to add to wheels and the lower portions of vehicles that simulates the type of terrain that a vehicle encounters.

The last step is to spray the model with a final coat of flat, clear lacquer. The same clear lacquer that was used in the dry brushing step will also be used here. Let it dry for a day. The reason for the final coat of flat lacquer is to seal everything that you have painted on the model so it gives it a protective coat. It also gives the model a dull, flat finish that looks realistic. A shiny clean model only looks like a toy.

Though these steps do require some prior experience and practice in model building and painting, they will improve the realism and accuracy of your models. Building models is not something that can be learned overnight and done quickly. It takes time, practice, and mistakes to become an expert, but if you follow these steps – researching, preparing the pieces, gluing, painting, washing, dry brushing, and adding the final touches – you will be pleased with the result.

*Andrew Bolduc, 19, lives in Haverhill, MA, and enjoys bass fishing and model building. He took Basic Writing with Pat Scannell in the fall semester of 2006. Andrew states, "Basic Writing has given me the essential foundation for composing high-quality essays."*

# Dear Basic Writer:

We are Basic Writing students. We have been in class for 13 weeks now. When we were entering the class, we had the same concerns as you probably have. One of our fears was not being able to manage our time well between working, life, and doing homework. Other major fears of ours were writing an essay correctly, or being picked on to speak out loud and answer questions in class.

One of our major concerns before coming into Basic Writing was the basic construction of paragraphs or essays. Neither one of us did very well in English class in high school, so it made us both very nervous to write paragraphs and essays. Some of the ways that helped us overcome this fear are some of the handouts our teacher handed out during class. The handouts would go over elements of a paragraph or an essay. Your teacher will give you, as a new student, all the tools needed to succeed. Also, for each essay that we would do, there was a student that did the same assignment in the Writers in Progress book, so seeing what they wrote and how they set up their essays helped us prepare for what we were about to encounter.

We think the biggest concern about taking the Basic Writing class had to be managing our time. We both work fulltime and one of us has small children at home. We thought we wouldn't have enough time in the day to do our homework. But the class has proven not to be as scary or as daunting as we thought. The teacher teaches the class well and makes it actually fun in class, which in turn makes us look forward to doing the homework. It turned out not to be the chore that we thought it was going to be.

We were also concerned about answering questions asked of us out loud in class. Both of us are pretty shy and quiet people, so being asked to answer a question out loud was terrifying. After we had our first couple of classes, we found out that basically everyone in class had the same fears as us. That made answering questions out loud a lot easier. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

As we both come to the end in Basic Writing, we have become a little less shy; in the process of writing, we have become more confident with the preparation of an essay. We think that the more that we wrote essays, it became easier and will become easier for you as well. Your Basic Writing teacher gives you all of the tools that you will need to succeed.

Sincerely,
Leslie and Mark

No More Red Eyes
by Scott Fleet

For the last 17 years, I have worked for Northwest Airlines. It is an industry that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are flights arriving at all hours of the day. Because of this schedule, the airlines have employees working around the clock. This may be convenient as a passenger, but as an employee this is an inconvenience for many reasons. In my opinion, as an airline employee, airports should be closed at night.

The safety of the employee is one reason I feel the airports should close at night. The tarmac at night can be a hazardous place to be. There is a lot of activity going on when an airplane arrives at the gate. There are people and equipment all around the area that employees must be aware of when waving in a plane. The planes that overnight must be pushed out to a remote area at the other end of the airport. When doing this, there are two employees on either side of the plane that employees have to watch for. There are also other planes and buildings employees must navigate around. The darkness of night makes it harder to see the people you are working with. The lack of sleep from working these hours affects the employees' thinking and reaction time. This makes the working conditions more dangerous. There was one time when we were fueling all the equipment. The fuel farm was on the other end of the airport, so we had to drive the equipment there. One of my coworkers was driving the stair truck to be fueled. He thought he was driving the pickup truck, which is about 15 feet shorter in height. My coworker tried to drive under the building and got stuck under the building. There was considerable damage to the truck, as well as the building. When the airport police asked him what happened, he told them he was tired and did not realize that he had taken the stair truck, and not the pickup. This also affects employees off the clock as well. There have been many times that I have nodded off while driving home. This is an obvious hazard to the employee, as well as to other drivers on the road.

Another reason airports should close at night is the health of the employee. In my experience, I have found that people who work the overnight shift do not get adequate sleep. The lack of sleep has a significant effect on the health of the employee. In my time working the overnight shift, I was sick more frequently than when I was on days. I also felt that it took me longer to recover from a sickness. I also felt that due to the lack of sleep, I was irritable more often. I feel the winter months made this worse. Because I was sleeping during the day, there were days when I did not see any sunlight. The diet of the

employee is also affected. Because I was on such a reverse schedule, I found myself not eating very well. I would be eating breakfast at dinnertime, then trying to eat dinner at three in the morning. This schedule is not very conducive to the health of the employee.

The third reason I feel airports should close at night is the lack of family time for the employees. The opposite sleeping schedules impact the time I had with my family. I would come home from work and go to bed when my family was starting their day. This would only give me a little time at the end of the day to see my family. I then decided I would try to stay awake to spend more time with them. This did not work well, as I would be tired and have a hard time staying awake. I did not get to spend much time with them on my days off either, as I found myself catching up on lost sleep. Even when I was able to spend time with my family, it was not quality time because I was tired and not into what we were doing. I feel this put too much strain on me and my family. This is why I got off the overnight shift as soon as possible.

A fourth reason I feel airports should be closed at night is it would lower operating costs. These savings would be achieved through lower payroll. The night shift has the highest rate of sick calls and on-the-job injuries of all the shifts. Because of this, the company must cover these positions with overtime. This overtime comes from either the morning or the afternoon shifts. This gets expensive because to cover an eight-hour shift, the company must pay the overtime employee time and a half for the first four hours, and double time for the last four hours. They are also still paying the covered employee sick pay or injury pay.

A fifth reason I feel airports should close at night is due to the savings through lower fuel costs. Planes use a tremendous amount of fuel to fly even a short distance. During the day these costs are offset by the high passenger counts, as well as carrying cargo for the freight companies. The planes that arrive at night have very few passengers and rarely any cargo. The company says they need these planes for the early morning launch flights. To solve this problem, they could use the planes that go out in the early evening, as these planes go out nearly empty of passengers and cargo also.

These are the reasons that airports should be closed at night. The employees' safety and health would benefit, as well as the airlines themselves. The operating costs for the company would be lowered as well. This would be due to lower payroll, utilities, and fuel costs. Because the majority of planes that arrive on nights have very few passengers on them, I believe the public would not be adversely affected.

*Scott Fleet, 37, lives in Wakefield, MA, with his wife, Melissa, and their two children, Adam and Emma. He is a radiologic technology major at NECC. Before taking Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class, Scott was nervous about sharing his writing with others because he was unsure of how to write an essay. Now that he's completed the course, he says, "I am much more confident in my writing and letting people read it."*

Employees with Better Skills Should Get Good Raises
by Janki Javia

Don't you hate it when you work twice as much as your coworkers and your boss gives you both the same raise? Well, I do. I have been working for the last three years as a cashier at Building 19. By now, I have more knowledge about the registers than any other ordinary cashiers. I believe that my boss should give me a bigger raise than the other coworkers because I am a better skilled cashier, a reliable worker, and I always go in when they need me.

One reason I think I deserve a better raise is that I am an excellent skilled cashier. I am a regular cashier, which basically means that I only have to learn the front register where all the customers pay. I don't have to worry about the returns and furniture desk. However, I can say that because in the last few years, I have learned how to use the registers at the service desk for returns and the big ticket sales at the furniture desk. Sometimes on Sundays I help them as a front-end person who gives cashiers change for their drawers and also voids if the cashier needs it. For example, if the person at the desk has to go somewhere, they will ask me to cover the service desk for a few minutes. Basically I know how to operate the service desk to do returns and the furniture desk for big ticket sales. I also know how to void items from the registers. Also I know how to transfer money. I know almost everything about the cash register than any other ordinary cashiers. Therefore, I think I deserve a superior raise than the other cashiers.

The second reason my boss should give me a good raise is I am a very reliable worker. There isn't one day in the last few years that I am scheduled to work that I called out or went in late. I am very good with that. One day I wasn't feeling extremely good. I had a fever and headache. I was supposed to work at four in the afternoon on that day. I came home early from the college that day. The first thing I did was that I took a shower. After the shower, I took some medicines and then I went instantly to bed to take a nap so that I would feel a little better before I went to work. When I got up after my nap, I felt much better. I was a little weary though. It was 3:45 p.m. when I left my house. When I walked in, I saw Jean who was at the first register. When she saw me, she smiled then said, "Hi, honey. Where is your smile? Are you okay?"

I said, "I am a little sick but I think I will be fine. I missed you. Welcome back, Jean. How are you doing?"

She said, "Ahhhh…I am happy to see you all but I still wish I was on my vacation." Then she started to laugh. Then I saw Robin, who is our assistant manager, who was standing at the Pepsi machine. She noticed right away that I wasn't in a good mood.

I asked her, "Who is the manager tonight?"

She said, "Your favorite one." I was happy to know that she was the manager for that night. I like working for her. She came to me and said, "What is the matter with you, Janki?"

I said, "Robin, I don't feel much better today. I am kind of sick, but I still came to work."

She said, "I appreciate that you came in today. I will let you go home around 7:00 if it's not that busy."

I said, "Thank you. You're the best." No matter how I feel I would still go to work. They know that I will always be there on time and I will never call out. For that reason, I think I should get an excellent raise.

The third reason that I should get a good raise is that I go in if they call at my house, or if they ask me to do a double I always say yes. In the past couple of years, you would not believe how many times I have gone to work on my day off or I have done doubles. If anybody will call out, they will directly call at my house, or if I am working they will ask me to do a double. I never say no to them. I will give you one example. On one Tuesday, I was working in the morning. That means I get to go home at 5:00. I was so happy. I had everything planned out what I wanted to do as soon as I got home. It was around 4:30 I started to clean my register. Then all of a sudden I realized that I hadn't seen Stephanie yet. I saw Vanessa, but no Stephanie. I thought that she might be coming in late. I went to the service desk to see if she had called to let them know that she was running late. I saw nothing at the service desk. It was 4:45. I had five more minutes to work, then I was out of there. I went back to my register to pull my register tape. After I pulled my register tape, I was waiting for the manager's key to get pulled. I saw Judy and Robin coming toward me. Judy is also my assistant manager. I said to them, "I need only one key, not two." They started to laugh.

Robin said, "Okay, smart boss." I was laughing so hard. We always tease each other. We really have a good time when we work together. We are like friends.

Judy said, "Janki, I need you to do me one favor today."

I said, "Okay, anything for you, Jude."

Judy said, "Stephanie just called out. I need you to stay tonight, please, please." I was so quiet at first. I said nothing at first.

Judy said, "I will let you go home early tonight. I really need you. Please say yes. I will let you take more breaks."

I said, "Okay, only the last time. I better get as many breaks as I want."

She said, "You can do anything you want tonight. I will not say a word. Take as many breaks as you want to take. I don't care." She was so happy that I agreed to work. They know that they can always count on me. I give them a little hard time to say yes, but I always end up doing it.

In conclusion, my boss should appreciate my efforts. She should give me a better raise for these reasons. I am a better skilled cashier, a reliable worker, and I always go in when they need me. Also I do doubles. They know that they can count on me at any time. In the future, if they don't give me a good raise, I will probably get another job where I could make more money to support myself.

*A radiologic technology major at NECC, Janki Javia, 19, lives in Haverhill, MA, with her family. She took Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class in the summer of 2006. Before taking the class, she hated to write. Now that she has completed Basic Writing, she says, "I feel like I have more confidence in my writing ability."*

Overdevelopment
by Danielle Ryan

I thought I would always get to live in a quiet neighborhood with a lot of privacy. I did for the majority of my childhood. Hampstead was quiet and only had little corner stores. The closest gas station that would stay open past 10:00 was 15 minutes away. The communities were small and you had a lot of privacy. Just about two years ago, they started tearing down the woods I live right next to. The town I live in, Hampstead, started to grow and now they're developing new condominiums. In my opinion, Hampstead residents should stop selling the land so the town doesn't become overdeveloped. Hampstead was a little town that I thought would never grow to get as big as it's getting.

One of the reasons the Hampstead residents should stop developing is that it causes more traffic. I live on a circle and it used to be quiet with not many cars coming down the street. Ever since they started developing condominiums, cars come in and out of the road and they drive pretty fast, too. The work vehicles also drive up and down the street. My neighborhood was always quiet, and the only thing that woke you up in the morning was the birds or the sound of kids playing. Now the noises that wake you up are work trucks, radios, and people building. I hope they get done soon so it can be quiet again and work trucks won't be driving up and down the street.

The most important reason the residents should stop building new communities is that it becomes less safe for the kids. My friends and I would play out in the circle without worrying about cars getting in the way. We also never worried about strangers because we knew our neighborhood and thought it was safe. Since Hampstead started developing, there's more traffic and different people in the neighborhood. Even though the new people are probably harmless, it's still hard to get used to people you don't know. I think that it's less safe for the kids to play now because of how fast they drive down the street. When I see kids playing outside, I always worry about them getting hit by a car or strangers coming up to them. It's just unfortunate the neighborhood isn't as safe as it used to be.

Another reason they should cut down on developing is that people are losing their privacy. On our land we didn't have to worry about people seeing in our house because in the backyard there were woods next to our rock wall, and we were nice and secluded. No one was able to see in our backyard. Now the new development is up and there's only a thin line of trees that block the condominiums from seeing in our backyard. One of my favorite things about my house was the privacy that we had. We also have a pool, and we wouldn't worry about having a little party without anyone bothering us. Now we're scared to play the music too loud in case of someone calling for a noise complaint.

Speed limit signs should be put up throughout the new development so the cars won't drive as fast. There's a big possibility that one of the kids could get hurt if they don't put up speed-limit signs. I also think that they should've put up wooden fences around the condominiums to keep the privacy. That way the new residents would have privacy for themselves and we would get to keep our privacy. I believe there should also be a law about how much land can be sold so Hampstead doesn't become overpopulated.

One of the best things about living in Hampstead was the small-town atmosphere. I do understand that in time things grow and change. It's just unfortunate that it had to

happen right next to my house. I think Hampstead residents should realize how fast the town is growing. To keep the town small and safe, the residents should hold onto their land and cherish how nice the town is.

*A nursing major at NECC, Danielle Ryan, 19, is working towards a career as a pediatric nurse. She lives in Hampstead with her father and her sister. She took Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class and feels that she has improved as a writer. In her spare time, she likes taking care of children and being with her friends.*

The Writer Inside
by Tracy DiJulia

Nearly five months ago, I remember registering for the spring semester, and Basic Writing was one of the classes included in my schedule. I honestly was not too excited. I knew I needed to learn the skills, but I had no desire to actually take the class. Now that the semester is almost over, my attitude is different. I'm really glad that I was able to take Basic Writing this semester. I have learned helpful skills such as prewriting, developing a thesis statement, and how to revise a final draft. I am now more confident in my ability to compose a focused, well-written essay.

On the first day of class, we were asked to fill out a student profile. One question asked, "How do you go about completing a writing assignment?"

I responded, "I'm usually a one-draft kind of girl. I always proofread and make necessary changes, but I don't write out an outline or rough draft."

This would no longer be a true statement. The time spent in Basic Writing this semester has taught me the value of prewriting as well as revising. I always thought that prewriting was a waste of my time. I now have learned how prewriting helps me to get all my thoughts down on paper. Once all my ideas are out, I can choose which thoughts will best support my topic.

The three forms of prewriting that I found work best for me are freewriting, brainstorming, and listing. I feel that freewriting and brainstorming go hand in hand. Freewriting is an opportunity for me to get all my thoughts and ideas out of my head and onto paper. Brainstorming allows me the opportunity to expand on main ideas. The questions that were outlined in various parts of Basic Writing: Through the Prism of Experience were so helpful that I plan on using them for future papers. Listing is another way for me to get all my thoughts onto paper. I like to check off my ideas as I use them in my rough drafts.

Learning to develop a thesis statement was one of the most important skills I learned this semester. Once I write a thesis statement, I have a direction to go in and it helps me to keep my essay focused on the topic. It's something I can use to make sure my essay has a natural flow. It also helps me when I write the conclusion. I am able to restate the thesis statement and bring my thoughts to a close. Once my rough draft is completed, I have learned to go back and revise the thesis statement to better fit the paper.

When I finished an essay before I took Basic Writing, I would just be glad it was over. I now know that revising is the key to a stronger paper. I actually enjoy going back and strengthening my paper now that I have the skills to do so effectively. I learned several ways to revise a paper, including changing the title. My favorite essay to revise was the person essay, in which I wrote about my sister. That was when I began to see the value of revision. I chose to revise this paper again for the first graded essay. I was amazed with how I was able to still find things I could change to strengthen it the second time around. I think I could still go back now and touch it up even more.

The essay I enjoyed writing the most was the media essay. I chose music as my favorite medium, and I was pleased with the final draft. I began the introduction with the statement, "The sound of a single flute fills the room. As more instruments are harmoniously added, you can't help but imagine a nightingale. The composer rightly

named the song 'The Nightingale,' since it was inspired by the sound of this bird." The title of the essay was "My Motivation and Inspiration," and this was based on my thesis statement, which was, "Music is something that motivates me and helps me to focus, it inspires me in my work, and it has the power to stir up emotions and memories." Every paragraph in the body was able to expand on this statement. I also chose to revise this paper for a grade.

Now that I have finished Basic Writing, I feel prepared to take English Composition I and the other classes that require Basic Writing as a prerequisite. I plan on using different prewriting skills when papers are assigned in these classes. I feel capable of putting together an essay that has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion that all support the thesis statement. I will continue revising papers using the skills I have been taught this entire semester, so that I can present the strongest papers possible. The most surprising part of this class was learning that there is a writer inside of me.

*Tracy DiJulia, 27, lives in Merrimack, NH, with her husband. She is a dance instructor and choreographer, and she enjoys photography. In the spring of 2007, Tracy took Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class. Since completing the course, she says, "I feel confident in my abilities to put together a focused, strong paper."*

From Basic to Good Writer
by Alen Omerbegovic

Writing, it is so simple but at the same time so difficult. In order to be successful in life and at work, we need to know how to express ourselves in written form. In today's world of emails, if you sent an email to a lot of people with some simple mistakes, people will think that you are stupid and uneducated. For some people it comes naturally. At the same time, some people are struggling with it. I am the one who had and still has troubles to express myself in written form. Because of that, I decided to go to college and improve my writing stills. Basic Writing helped me to wake up my inner writer inside of me and to think before you write something. The most valuable techniques that I use now and that I learned in my class are prewriting, revising, and proofreading.

The most important technique when I am writing a paper is prewriting. Without prewriting, my paper would be without ideas and very dry. Prewriting enables me to put my ideas on a piece of paper and then I use it as a source for my paper. I remember when I had to do an object essay. With prewriting, I developed my idea and I used prewriting to prepare myself for detailed object description. For the object essay, I wrote about my wedding ring. I had to provide detailed description about my ring, the way it looks, is there any specific writing on the inside, and what this ring means to me. Prewriting is a very good tool, especially for the new writers who need to find the way to express themselves.

The second most valuable technique I use now in my writing class is editing. I remember for my second graded essay I decided to write about the internet and the way it shaped my life. My first draft was in very bad shape. My ideas were not clear, and overall it did not really look the way I had in my mind. After our editing class, my eyes opened up and I really noticed the difference. When I edit the essay, it is like I am editing somebody else's story, not mine, and it enables me to critique the writer. Editing is a great way to go back to the essay and to add new paragraphs to the story. With the editing, I also find and fix or delete sentences or paragraphs that I do not like.

The third most valuable and my favorite technique I use now in my writing class is proofreading. I used proofreading for my first graded essay when I wrote about my mother. Proofreading is a great tool, which enables me to look at my story as an average reader and to look for mistakes. Proofreading is so simple and so useful. I believe we should proofread everything that we write because once you write something it stays with you. I remember when I proofread my graded essay. I made so many common mistakes on spelling, and my grammar was terrible. By proofreading the essay first, I managed to catch some of the mistakes and I looked with different eyes on my mother. It is like somebody else told me what my mother did for me in my life and how valuable she is to me. When I proofread my essays it is like I am looking at it with a new set of eyes and I am in charge of finding mistakes.

Basic Writing taught me the writing process and basics of writing. Through my course I have become a more proficient writer, and my goal is to keep developing my writing skills. For me, to whom English is a second language, the goal is to make sure that my writing becomes as professional as possible in order to succeed in life. This class encouraged me to think of myself as a good writer and not be ashamed of the way I write

because I noticed that I am not the only one with this struggle. Basic Writing class gave me reasons to believe that I can be a good writer and ideas how to get there. With the new skills, like editing, proofreading, and prewriting, I know that I am ready for new college courses and new writing challenges.

*Alen Omerbegovic, 31, lives with his wife in Salem, NH, and is working toward a criminal justice career. Alen took Clare Thompson-Ostrander's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2007. After taking the course, he says, "I am very proud of me now. I feel that I have the basics of writing under my belt now and I am ready for Comp. I."*

Better and Without Fear
by Jolanta Retelle

Before I took my Basic Writing class, I didn't have a warm feeling about writing in English. English is not my native language. I learned English as my second foreign language, concentrating mostly on studying new words, phrases, correct grammar, and pronunciation. In my English classes, I had never learned the rules and mechanism of writing an American essay. I always felt fear when I had to write. My writing class changed my attitude towards writing. During the last four months, I have developed many new skills that help me to improve my writing. I have become a better writer because my writing class gave me a clear understanding of the writing process, taught me how to organize my essay, and helped me gain confidence.

First of all, my writing class gave me a clear understanding of the writing process. Every class we were told all the steps involved in the writing process and the importance of each of them. Today all those steps are engraved in my head so deeply that without the slightest hesitation I will list all of them: prewriting, composing a rough draft, revising, editing, and proofreading. Each of these steps has their own unique function, and following them as a guide helps me to write a good essay. I remember initially when I wrote my second essay, "My Mother's Devotion," I didn't spend time on prewriting. I thought I had plenty of things to write about my mother, and I could just skip this step altogether. Soon I discovered that it was my big mistake. I was lost with all the information I had. I didn't have any clear plan. I have learned my lesson! Prewriting helps you not only to collect, but also to organize your thoughts. Organized thoughts are extremely important in the process of writing a good, easy to understand essay. Understanding and following all of the steps of the writing process helped me to become more successful in writing my essays.

Another important skill that I developed in my writing class is how to organize my essay. I have learned that each essay should have a thesis statement. A thesis statement is important because it tells the reader the main idea or the purpose of the essay. A thesis statement is usually at the end of the introduction paragraph. I also learned about forecasting statements in my writing class. The forecasting statement is just before or after the thesis statement. It gives the reader an initial sense of how the essay is organized. For example, in the introduction part of "The Magic of Brass Music," I wrote, "For the last two years, brass music has become my favorite type of music." This is my thesis statement. I let my readers know that my essay would be about brass music. After the thesis statement I wrote my forecasting statement, "I love brass music because it gives me energy, it inspires me, and it brings me closer to my husband." I learned that just like each essay needs to have a thesis statement, each paragraph needs to have a topic sentence. The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence is always the first sentence in each paragraph. For example, in my essay "You Too Can Save Our Planet," one of my paragraphs starts with the topic sentence, "By simply planting a tree one person can make a big difference in the fight to stop global warming because trees reduce carbon dioxide." The topic sentence indicates that in this paragraph I will be writing about the significance of planting trees, why and how every single tree makes a difference. I learned in my class that besides a topic sentence each paragraph should have supporting sentences and often a concluding sentence. A concluding

sentence is especially important when a paragraph is long. It reminds the reader about the main topic of the paragraph, summarizes it, and completes it. The concluding sentence in this long paragraph is: The knowledge that I obtained in my writing class about the structure of the essay helped my writing to be more organized and effective, and definitely made me a stronger writer.

My writing class also helped me to gain confidence in my writing abilities. First, I was very intimidated by other students who had finished high school in America. All I could think about was that my writing would never be as good as theirs because English is not my first language and I can't express myself as beautifully and clearly as I would like to. Because of my language insecurity, I worked very hard on each of my essays. It wasn't hours but days that I needed to write each of my essays. I didn't stop revising my sentences until I was completely satisfied with the ending result. I was pleasantly surprised and happy when I got my first essay "White Birch Tree" back. My professor, Mr. Wilcomb, wrote in his comments that I did an exceptional job and I should think about submitting my essay for consideration in Writers in Progress. That was a moment that changed my attitude toward writing in English. I was not afraid to write anymore. Today I looked in my folder at all my essays with satisfaction and pride. It still is not easy to write for me, but I have become more confident, and that is an important step toward becoming a successful writer.

Writing is one of the most important skills that anyone can have. Without good, clear, effective writing you cannot succeed in college or in your life. Writing in English was never easy for me, but since I have taken this class I have become a better writer. I acquired many new skills that help me to improve my writing. This class taught me the importance of the writing process. I learned how to organize my essay and my paragraphs. I also gained a confidence in my ability to write. Basic Writing is the beginning class, the first step in the development of my writing skills. The next class I need to take is Composition I. My Basic Writing class has prepared me for that class. Now with my new solid foundation and many wonderful writing techniques I am not afraid to take the Composition I class and face new challenges in my development to become a better writer.

*Jolanta Retelle, 46, is married, lives in Andover, and is working toward a nursing career. She was in Mike Wilcomb's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2007. Since taking the class, Jolanta states, "Now, I know the structure of the essay and basic writing techniques, and that is why I feel more relaxed when I write."*